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THE PHANTOM TRACKER;

THE PHANTOM TRACKER:

OR,

THE PRISONER OF THE HILL CAVE.

CHAPTER I.

THE PRISONER OF THE HILL CAVE.

BY FREDERICK DEWEY,

AUTHOR OF "THE DOG TRAILER," "WILL-O'-THE WISP," ETC.

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THE PHANTOM TRACKER;

OR,

THE PRISONER OF THE HILL CAVE.

CHAPTER I.

THE CAVE-HUNTER AND THE SHADOW.

IT was a sultry, scorching day, on the banks of the river Gila—very sultry and silent. The sun in the zenith looked whitely down, and the yellow banks reflected its rays fiercely on the sluggishly-creeping, warm river. Away over the flat, glistening plain reigned the utmost silence. As far as the eye could reach it saw nothing—only dead level, dead heat, and dead silence. Here, mile upon mile from civilization, hundreds of miles away from any habitation, this vast wilderness stretched away—always level, always hazy, always silent—a spectral land.

A large catfish lazily rolled and tumbled on the surface of the river, too hot to swim, and too stupid to move—lying there, he only, at times, waved his fins and tumbled gently. A vulture sat on a sand-crag just above him—a water-vulture, or, rather, a brown, dirty fish-hawk. He was lazily watching his chance to swoop suddenly down upon the fish, and carry him off in his talons. But it was too hot to undergo any useless exertion, so he watched and waited for a sure chance, pluming himself moodily.

A panting coyote sat on his house at a little distance, watching the pair, and vaguely conscious that he was very hungry; a mule-rabbit under an adjacent tiny shrub tremblingly watched the coyote, starting violently at the slightest movement of the latter; and a huge yellow serpent, long and supple, dragged his scaly body up the bluff toward the rabbit.

The sun shone redly down now, leaving its white appearance for a sanguinary and blood-red hue ; a haze was brewing.

Suddenly the quiet was disturbed. The coyote sneaked away, with his bristly chin upon his lank shoulder ; this alarmed the rabbit, and he, too, fled, making the most gigantic leaps ; in ten seconds he had disappeared. The snake's eyes flashed in enraged disappointment, and hissing spitefully, he raised his head to discover the cause of the hasty flight.

He soon saw it. On the barren banks he could have seen a mouse at a long distance. The object he saw was the exact reverse of that diminutive quadruped, being a large, stalwart, swarthy man, on a large black horse.

He appeared suddenly, riding over the crest of an adjacent hillock. He stopped on the summit, glared keenly around, then rode down into the river. He stopped in the river where the thirsty horse drank greedily. Then, after dismounting and drinking deeply himself, he boldly rode up the opposite bank.

He appeared well acquainted with the locality, for this was the only fordable place for miles—either the river was too deep or the bottom too soft—"quicksandy."

Riding up the bank, he halted and sat for a moment buried in profound thought. He was a Mexican, a giant in proportions. His visage was that of a crafty, wily man, and his keen black eye was one that never quailed. His dress was simple, being in the American manner, of well dressed buckskin. He however still clung to his *sombrero*, which, instead of being cocked jauntily on the side of his head, was drawn down over his eyes to shield them from the hot sun. His whole equipment was that of a mounted ranger, and this style of dress has so often been described as to be familiar to all.

Instead of the short carbine which a Mexican habitually carries, he sported a long, elegant rifle—a very witch to charm a hunter's eye. Then he had a brace of silver-mounted revolvers, each firing five times without reloading. Like the rifle, they were costly, and fatally precise and true, models of expensive and beautiful workmanship.

But in his belt was that which, however captivating to the eye *they* might be, cast them into the shade. It was a long

dagger, double-edged, sharp as a razor, with a basket handle of rare workmanship. This last was gold (the handle)—pure, yellow gold, chased and milled into all manner of quaint and droll devices. It hung jauntily in its ornamented sheath at his belt, and his hand was forever caressing its beautiful handle.

Why should this man, forty years of age, rough, plainly dressed, riding with the stealthy air of one who is at war—with a ragged saddle and plain, even homely steed, have such elegant and costly weapons? They cost a large sum, evidently, and should be the property of a prince.

While he is caressing his dagger, as the weapons and their history are the subjects of this narrative, let us go back a year for a brief space.

The name of the Mexican was Pedro Felipe, the old and tried servant of a wealthy and kind master, also a Mexican. A year ago his master, Señor Martinez, had occasion to cross a vast, sterile wilderness, lying a hundred or more miles north of the Gila river. While on that plain, in a remote part of it, called the Land of Silence (a ghostly, spectral plain, considered haunted), his only daughter, a beautiful young girl, was abducted by a robber chief, and carried away to a rendezvous—a hollow hill in the plain. Here she was rescued by Pedro, disguised as a black savage.

The hillock had an aperture in it, and Pedro, on hearing a noise, looked out and saw the lieutenant of the band, a fierce man called the "Trailer," approaching. Knowing he must take his life or be discovered by the whole band, he shot him dead, from off his horse.

From the Trailer's body he took the weapons we have described, and then left the body to be devoured by wolves and birds of prey. He was certain that in the hillock a large treasure was secreted, but fearing to be discovered by the band, whom he expected to arrive every hour, he left without searching for it. But the band, he soon after learned, disbanded without returning to the hillock, and left for Mexico.

Pedro had but one glaring fault—the love of gold. He was now on his way to the hill in the Land of Silence, to search for the treasure, and he felt confident of finding it. Why not? The captain and the Trailer were dead—he had

seen them both fall; the party had at the same time disorganized; and he was certain they had never returned to seek for it.

The Trailer had been the last robber on the spot, and he himself had killed him; so he was certain of finding the treasure untouched.

Pedro Felipe's absorbing love of gold had brought him on this hot day to the northern bank of the Gila, on his way to the Land of Silence in search of it.

The sun gleamed redly through the haze as Pedro looked northward, with his raven eye toward the spectered Land of Silence. It was an ill-fated land. Many dark and mysterious deeds had taken place there, many deeds of which the world would never know. Indians and hunters avoided it and deemed it haunted by evil spirits. Well it might be; it was a ghostly, hazy, quiet place, where the sun shone fiercely, and water was scarce.

Pedro's experience had been strange in this land, and he was very superstitious. But he was also brave and crafty, having the reputation of being the best Mexican scout and Indian-fighter in his part of the country.

So, urged on by his love of gold—his only and great fault—and by the prospect of adventure and excitement, he was to brave, alone and unaided, the land of specters and of death—the Land of Silence.

He turned his horse's head to the south, and peered away over the plain. Nothing was in sight; he was alone in the vast wilderness.

"Farewell, Mexico!" he said; "good-by to your sunny plains and pleasant groves! May it not be long before I come back to thee, my land! Farewell, my old master, my beautiful mistress, and her noble husband; my old companion, Benedento—and all I hold dear. This morning I stood on your border, sunny Mexico. To-morrow, at sunset, I will be alone, *alone* in the Land of Silence. Farewell, my land! I may never tread your soil again."

He slowly dismounted, and placing his arm affectionately round his steed's neck, raised his *sombrero* reverently.

"My faithful horse, we must go; time is precious. Once more, farewell, my land."

He waved his hand with a graceful parting-salute, calmly, but with a vague presentiment of coming evil. Then he remounted, turning his horse's head to the north; under the hot sun, blazing with blinding heat, in the desert alone, he rode away, bound for the Land of Silence.

As he started, a vulture rose from an adjacent knoll, and wheeled slowly above him, and croaked dismally. Was it a bad augury—the warning of evil to come?

The vulture returned to his perch; the other animals returned to their former places, and Pedro was riding away.

As the last wink of the setting sun gleamed out over the silent plain, a new form appeared on the southern bank of the river. He, too, peered sharply about him when he reached the crest of the knoll, and he was very wary and watchful. When he had finished his scrutiny without seeing any thing to alarm him, or arouse distrust, he rode down the bank.

In the river his horse (a powerful black) halted to drink; but the rider never moved. Then, when he had finished, the horse stepped up the northern bank and galloped away toward the north.

The traveler was dressed in buck-skin; was armed to the teeth; had a black, conical hat in which a black plume nodded and waved, and a face in which glowed two raven eyes.

He was an ugly-looking customer—a desperado in appearance.

In the twilight soon horse and rider became blended in one blurred mass as they receded, rapidly growing fainter to the sight, and further away. In half an hour darkness had fallen, and they were no longer visible from the river bank.

Who was the rider?

Ask the winds.

Where was he going?

To the Land of Silence, directly in the Mexican's tracks.

CHAPTER II.

LOST IN THE DESERT.

ON the afternoon in which last chapter's events occurred, a train of three wagons plodded slowly up to the southern bank of the Gila, about twenty miles east from the place where Pedro forded it. Here was quite a good ford, and it was somewhat in use, being on a northern trail—one of the many from Mexico to the north. The country about it was exactly similar to that around the other ford with one exception—away in the east, Vulture Mountain was barely visible in the distance. From that mountain toward the east the Gila river was constantly under the quiet supervision of a sandy-rocky range of disconnected mountains, to its extreme source. But here all was flat, sterile, and quiet.

The wagons were accompanied by several horsemen, and one horsewoman—or rather, young girl. In fact, these were almost the entire party, the only ones in the wagons being the teamster, one American, and two Canadians.

It was a small train—a “whiffit-outfit.” Three wagons were a small number beside the dozens that generally consorted. It could easily be seen it was not the property of a large stock-owner or freighter, but was evidently the property of a single man—an emigrant.

It was even so. The man yonder on the verge of the bank—that sturdy, bronzed man of fifty or thereabouts, about whom the other horsemen gather, is the owner: Joel Wheeler, a northern New Yorker.

Hearing of the rapid fortunes which were constantly being made by enterprising Americans in Mexico, he had left a comfortable home in New York to gain immense riches. After being in that “golden” land for several years he had found out what many others had done before him—that the men in Mexico were as keen and shrewd at a bargain as any one else—in fact, many times, more so.

His exchequer ran low; marauding savages and violent

disease thinned his flocks ; his native servants plundered him ; until, completely disgusted and homesick, he packed his goods and chattels and started, *en route* for his old State.

His daughter, the horsewoman on the sorrel pony, was a sweet, lovely girl of eighteen. Blessed with natural beauty, the several years' sojourn in Mexico had done much to enliven and develop it—being a brunette she was rendered doubly comely by the fresh, dry air of that country.

Another of its pleasant freaks had it played upon her ; it had given her that much to be desired blessing, *perfect* health. From a pallid, feeble invalid she had become a jovial, blooming maid—a very picture of sound health. During her residence in Mexico she had, without losing her northern modesty and chastity, contracted the universal *abandon* of the graceful, indolent people, which, while it detracted nothing from her purity, visibly added to her external attractions. In one respect, however, she still clung to her former breeding—her equitation. While it was, and is, customary for Mexican ladies, when so inclined, to ride astride of a horse, and while she knew it was much the easiest way, she still rode, as she termed it, “in civilized fashion.”

Christina Wheeler (Christina being curtailed to the tantalizing appellation of Kissie) was a courageous, high-spirited girl. Though being in possession of several masculine traits, she still preserved that feminine reserve and chariness of conduct which is so necessary in male eyes, and without which woman sinks to the level of a beautiful, favorite dog, or a precise, costly gem. She was a kind and beloved mistress to the few servants ; and while treating them graciously and well, brooked no unseemly or obtrusive familiarity. Besides her beauty she was no nobler nor more intellectual than scores of women one may chance upon during a day's ride through a prosperous and refined district. But her beauty was regal—more—bewitching, as many a disappointed Mexican dandy only too well remembered, who had basked in her impartial smiles only to mope and sulk afterward.

Did I say impartial smiles ? I was wrong—entirely so. If report said truly, the sweetest were bestowed on her father's chief man, or foreman. He was with the party, being an adopted son of the old gentleman. Sturdy, self-reliant and

brave, and withal, handsome, being brought up from infancy with Christina, no wonder her romantic spirit had endowed him with all the qualities requisite as a hero. It had ; and as she gazed at him now, as he conversed with her father, she felt pleased at seeing how much he relied on young Carpenter.

The young man bestrode a light-colored steed, known from its peculiar color throughout the western and southern States as a "clay-bank." He was well curried and rubbed down ; indeed a curry-comb attached to his saddle-horn denoted this was an every-day occurrence, even in the desert.

Such a man was Samuel Carpenter. At twenty-five years of age he well understood wild life, and it showed his tidy, neat habits—every thing belonging to him being kept in perfect order.

The other two horsemen were rough-looking, wiry men of middle age. One, mounted on a gray "States horse," was Burt Scranton—Carpenter's assistant. The other was a man well known in southern Texas and northern Mexico—"Tim Simpson, the guide."

The latter, for a stipulated sum, had agreed to conduct the party by the shortest and quickest way to the Leavenworth and Texas trail—being nearly four hundred miles from their present position.

Like many others of his calling he was reticent in the extreme, scarcely speaking save in monosyllables. He had several reasons for this : one was that it *kept him out of trouble* ; another, that he was not annoyed by a cross-fire of questions, which guides detest.

The teamsters were Kit Duncan, an American, and Napoleon and Louis Robidoux, two brother Canadians, whom Joel Wheeler had brought from New York. They were now returning with glad hearts toward their northern home.

It is unnecessary to state the party was well armed—every man carried a rifle, and the regulation brace of revolvers and a "bowie." The wagons were drawn by horses—six to a wagon.

Instead of sitting in the wagon and driving, the teamsters had adopted the southern habit, of riding the "near" wheel-horse and guiding the leaders by a single line. When wish-

ing to "gee," he steadily pulled the line; to "haw," a short jerk was sufficient.

This is the party, its outfit and position, now on the southern bank of the Gila.

They forded the river and stood headed northward on the other side. Now they were in the heart of the Indian country—now they must be wary and guard against the hostile and cunning savages.

"Well," remarked Mr. Wheeler, looking north, "had we better stop here, or go on?"

The question was addressed to the guide, who was down on his knees searching for Indian "sign." He arose.

"Stop hyar."

"Why? what are your reasons?"

"Water hyar. No water fur forty mile."

"Is that so? Well, then we had better stop. We can't afford to lie out all night without water, can we Sam?"

"No, sir," replied the young man. "We should be obliged to fast if we did. When the weather is sultry, especially on the southern prairies, food begets thirst. We should suffer without water. Any old plainsman will tell you when out of water to keep your stomach empty, unless a dry cracker can be called food. It is true, medical men say the reverse; but, sir, men that have suffered thirst know that food without water is dangerous. *I have tried it.*"

"K'rect!" muttered the old guide, in assent.

"Skience is one thing an' experience is another," declared Burt Scranton. "I've studied one an' tried t'other. Unhitch, boys."

All hands went to work to prepare for the night. While the preparations for camping were going on, the cook, Kit Duncan (the hardest worked, and consequently sourest and snarliest man in the party), who was also a teamster, went down to the stream to fill his kettle with water.

A "jack-rabbit," startled at his approach, sprung from under a projecting sand-point, and darted away up the bank. As it gracefully and rapidly "loped" away, Christina (or Kissie, as we shall call her), ever on the alert, noticed it.

"Oh, what an enormous rabbit!" she cried. "The largest I ever saw. Pray, Simpson, is that the common rabbit?"

"No. Jack-rabbit."

"What a very odd name. Why do they call it so?"

The guide did not give the true answer—that because of its resemblance to a laughable beast of burden; but answered shortly, as he filled his pipe:

"Big ear; like—like—like—donkey."

"Oh, hum! I perceive. See, it has stopped under that little bush. There—Oh, my! it is hurt—it is lame! see how it limps—I will catch it, it is so curious."

Kissie was impulsive. Without further preface she lightly struck the sorrel pony with her riding whip, and on a swift gallop went after the rabbit, which slowly limped away.

The guide, being the only idle one, alone noticed her. He shook with suppressed laughter, awaiting the result.

The guide well knew, though Kissie did not, that this strange rabbit plays some unaccountable pranks, and is the direct cause of many hearty laughs at a "greenhorn's" expense. Seeing a human being, he at once retreats, limping as if badly hurt. This attracts some one not "well up" in prairie life, and he pursues it. But let the sequel tell its own tale.

As Kissie drew near, the rabbit bounded away as if suddenly cured of its disability, gaining some distance; then he limped again—this time dragging one of its hind-legs laboriously.

His long ears were laid upon his back, which was suddenly shrunken, as if by a shot in the spine; he pawed hastily with his fore-feet; and, evidently, was badly hurt. Perhaps his sudden activity was the result of severe fright, succeeded by a reaction—so reasoned Kissie.

"Bunny, Bunny," she cried, "you are mine—you are my captive."

She was quite close upon him, and was drawing closer at every spring. The rabbit was almost caught.

"Count not your chickens before they are hatched," warns an old saw. Perhaps it would have been better for Kissie to have recollected it. But on she went, with no other desire or thought besides catching the feebly-struggling animal.

To her surprise she drew no nearer, though the rabbit

seemed scarce moving, and Dimple was going at a smart gallop. Surprised and nettled, she plied the whip, and once again she was on the rabbit's very heels.

Once again the rabbit suddenly darted away as lightly as a deer; but only for a few smart leaps.

Again he seemed stricken by that odd impediment to his flight. It was very strange—what could it mean?

For an hour the strange chase continued, the participants sustaining their respective positions, while Dimple panted and lagged, and Kissie alternately wondered and plied the whip.

It was a rare place for a protracted chase. For miles and miles northward (the course they were following) the great, flat plain stretched away—although level, always hard and solid.

The chase still continued, still repeating itself: now a spurt, and the rabbit is near; Bunny springs once or twice and the sorrel pony is behind again.

Once she thought she had heard a shout far behind; but intent upon overtaking the rabbit, still kept on and looked not back.

At last the chase was terminated rather suddenly. Evidently becoming wearied with his frolics, the rabbit cast a single look behind, then to Kissie's utter dismay, darted away at full speed.

She had seen frightened antelopes flee like the wind; she had seen wild mustangs scour away in affright; but never before had she seen a "jack-rabbit" on his mettle.

There was a sudden streak before her, a small white speck bobbing up and down; and when Kissie reined in the pony she was alone. The rabbit was far away.

"Duped! miserably deceived!" were her exclamations as the truth forced itself upon her. "To think that insignificant creature had so much reason in him. Why, he was only deceiving me, after all—a mean trick to gratify his wicked little heart. I might have known it by the way he acted. Well, I never; and what a laugh there will be when I get back. Deceived by a paltry rabbit. I can imagine how they will laugh. Father will never let me hear the last of it—neither will that horrid Burt Scranton; only Sam will be my cham-

pion. And how that horrid guide will grin, too—I declare it makes me provoked to think of it.”

She pouted prettily and gazed where the sly animal had disappeared. Then she spoke again :

“ Well, it is of no use that I can see—my remaining here. It is ’most supper-time and I will go back, without my boasted capture. So, Dimple—tired, pet ? We are going back.”

She turned the pony’s head around and slowly cantered off, still musing over her defeat, without raising her head.

She had ridden a mile, perhaps, when it occurred to her she had better discover the whereabouts of the train. Accordingly she reined in, and raising her eyes, slowly scanned the prairie before her.

It was bare ; the train was not in sight.

Thinking some intervening hillock hid them from her sight, she rode some distance at right angles ; but still no white-capped wagons did she see.

She certainly must have become turned round ; she must be bewildered as to the direction she had been pursuing.

But no. She distinctly remembered seeing her shadow at her right hand when pursuing the rabbit. She was certain of that—quite sure. What easier than to ride back, keeping the shadow to the left of her ? She could not then go astray.

Christina was quick-witted. She had no sooner found the wagons were not in sight when the above reflection ran through her mind. She was impulsive, decided ; and knowing this to be the only means of again finding the wagons, started back, with her shadow over her left shoulder.

“ Man proposes, God disposes.”

She soon discovered that. No sooner had she started on the return track, than, as if to vex and annoy her, a bank of snow-colored clouds rose rapidly in the south. At the same moment a southerly breeze came lightly over the plain.

As said before, Kissie was a girl of keen and quick perceptions. She saw the bank of clouds arising ; she knew if not breeding a terrible squall, they were at least rolling on to obscure the sun ; then what were her chances of regaining camp ?

She knew they were few ; she knew the necessity of hard

riding ; and, plying the whip again, rode at a gallop with the shadow still over her left shoulder.

On the Southern plains, as with the Southern people, changes come and go with great speed. It was so in the present case ; for before the sorrel pony had cantered a mile the heavens above were clouded ; the sun was obscured.

A loud, swishing noise accompanied the fleecy clouds, somewhat in the rear of the advanced vapor. She reined in.

She was sufficiently versed in Southern life to feel no alarm at the approaching wind. Had it been from the north—a norther—she would have trembled ; but, coming from the south, she felt no alarm ; it was nothing but a “field” of drifting vapor, and in the course of an hour the sky might be clear again.

So, turning her pony’s hind quarters to the coming wind, she braced herself and waited its approach.

It came with a roar, and striking Dimple, almost took her off her feet ; but the sturdy little beast spread her legs and stood like a rock. Almost as soon as told it was past, rushing toward the north, gathering strength every moment : and, beyond a steady breeze, and a few floating particles in the air, the atmosphere was quiet.

Kissie looked at her tiny watch, and sighed : in another hour the sun would sink below the horizon. What, then, would become of her if she did not succeed in finding the camp ?

“I must ride somewhere,” she said, growing seriously alarmed. “If I haven’t the sun to guide me I must steer without it.”

So saying, she re-turned her pony’s head and rode away in a canter.

She had not gone far when she reined in with a very white face. Covering her eyes with her hands, she bowed her head, and her heart sunk.

“Oh, my God ! what shall I do ?” she moaned. “What shall I do ? Where shall I go ?”

Well might she feel alarmed ! well might she be terror-stricken ; for in her abstraction *she had turned round twice.*

CHAPTER III.

ASLEEP IN THE LAND OF SILENCE.

"TURNED round twice!" ejaculates the reader. "Why should she be terrified at such a slight thing?"

For a very good reason, for example: blindfold a person and after doing so turn him twice in his tracks. He then will be unable to tell with any degree of certainty to which point of the compass he is facing. So it was with Kissie. Though not blindfolded, she might as well have been, and might as well have turned round fifty times as twice. The flat plain was everywhere the same monotonous expanse, nowhere showing any landmarks, by the slightest depression or elevation.

No wonder she was frightened, even terrified. Had she been in a settled country, she would only have experienced vexation and discontent at being forced to spend the night on the prairie; but here she was, far from any settlement, lost from her companions, and in a hostile Indian country. She knew the latter to be fierce and bloodthirsty, and was aware they would not scruple to commit any outrage their cunning brains might suggest. She knew they were predatory and gregarious, often rambling in bands of from a dozen to fifty or a hundred. She knew also they were *the* fiends of the plains—either Comanches or Apaches, dreaded alike by quiet *ranchero* and courageous hunter.

Should she meet with them, what would be her fate—what her doom? What—

At this point in her reflections Dimple pawed impatiently, and tossing her head, snuffed the air; she was evidently fatigued and hungry and was impatient at being kept at a standstill.

"Quiet, Dimple! you are tired, pet; you have had a hard gallop after a day's march. Dear, dear me; that I had never left them."

But the pony was not very much fatigued. She was a

pure mustang, but recently captured and tamed, and could have galloped the entire day without faltering.

"Oh, where shall I go—what shall I do? Oh, heaven! I would I had never left them. Be quiet, I say, Dimple? what do you mean?"

The pony was stamping violently, and with tossing head was staring over the plain. Mechanically Kissie followed his gaze.

Away on the distant horizon (the eastern one, though she did not know it) she saw a solitary speck, moving slowly. It was that which had caused the mustang's alarm. It had evidently been in sight for some time, for now she remembered the pony had been restless for considerable time. It was some animal, perhaps a solitary horseman. Indeed, by straining her eyes, she was almost certain it was the latter, as she thought she could distinguish the necessary outlines of a mounted man.

The object was a man, and mounted on a black powerful horse. It was Pedro Felipe.

Had she known it was a white man, had she any reason to suppose he was not an enemy, she would have at once spurred toward him; but, knowing that numerous Indians were at all times scouring the plains, she desired rather to give him a wide berth, fearing he was one of that dreaded race.

She raised her whip, and striking the mustang sharply, was riding away when a new object appeared on the horizon, opposite the Mexican. Object? rather a number of blots, moving toward her. This she could tell as they appeared stationary while they rose and fell, like a galloping horse.

She had seen such objects before, and knew they were galloping animals. Knowing that scarcely any animals frequented the plain, from its sterility, she readily became aware that they were a band of mounted men.

She felt her heart leap joyously; it was her friends. They had doubtless become alarmed at her prolonged absence, and had started in search of her. Filled with joy at the thought, she pressed on, her fears at rest. Just then she looked for the far-distant, lone rider—he was not in sight; he had vanished.

Suddenly she stopped the mustang, and a deadly pallor overspread her countenance, a wild fear arose within her. She had counted thirteen distinct objects moving toward her.

Her father's party numbered seven—the one approaching numbered thirteen ; it could not be her friends—it could not.

Who were they ? Surely they were mounted men, surely they were not her friends ; who could they be ? They were coming, miles away, directly toward her.

The truth flashed upon her, and her heart sunk like lead. Sitting quietly in her saddle, she stared at them, drawing nearer every minute. Then she became aroused. Wheeling suddenly she plied the whip, and the wiry mustang, now somewhat refreshed, sprung away at a long, steady gallop, and the blots behind scattered, collected again, then rose and fell faster and shorter. The chase had commenced—she was pursued by Indians.

It was now sunset, as nearly as she could judge, and the cloudy sky overhead promised a brief, dark twilight, to be succeeded by a dark, murky night. The rainy season was now drawing near, and for aught she knew the clouds above might be the "advance-guard." This, at least, was in her favor.

Kissie was like her father—impulsive but cool. Looking back, she calculated the distance between her and the flying savages. It was nearly four miles. She looked at the sky and calculated that darkness would fall in less than an hour.

"They will have to ride like the wind to overtake Dimple in an hour," she said, with a small degree of hope. "Till then, Dimple, fly ; in an hour we may be safe for the present."

The mustang, as if cognizant of the importance of speed, tossed his plucky head, then bending it down, "reached" like a quarter-horse ; his sensitive nose had warned him of the proximity of his former hated foe—the red-man. Running without the incentive of whip or spur, he stretched away ; and behind came a dozen and one Apaches, grim and resolved ; they were on the war-trail.

At that hour a flock of vultures wheeling above, high in the zenith, looked down upon a strange scene—at least for that usually deserted plain. Directly beneath were a flying

maiden and galloping Indians—the latter in hot pursuit of the former; both mounted on fleet horses, both riding at full speed.

A few miles to the west a solitary horseman was pursuing his way northward, at a slow gallop. He was a Mexican—Pedro Felipe. At the rate, and in the direction the maiden was riding, it would not be long ere she would meet him—she riding north-westerly. Directly south and nearly fifteen miles behind Pedro, rode a dark, ugly-looking man on a black horse; and though the Mexican had left no visible trail, this mysterious rider was following him, directly in his very tracks. Riders on the savage-infested, weird plains generally look sharply in every direction to avoid their dreaded foes; they generally, if alone, keep close to timbered tracts; but this rider never gazed to the right, left, or behind him—only keeping his gaze fixed toward the Land of Silence.

In a south-easterly direction from him was a train encamped on the Gila, for the night. All the work had been finished. The horses were lariatd at hand; the rude kettle was boiling merrily; the cook was swearing and grumbling, as usual; but all was not quiet.

Ever and anon one of the several men lying lazily about would rise, and shading his eyes, peer toward the north-east, as if in search of something.

He was invariably unsuccessful; and, after anxiously gazing for several minutes, would return, and talk in low tones to his companions.

Then several would start up together and peer over the north-western plain; then, muttering anxiously, would return and lie down again, talking earnestly; something was wrong.

Even the cook, who was generally too hard at work, tired and surly to pay attention to any thing outside of his "Dutch-oven," would now and then pause and look anxiously toward the north-west; it was plain something was wrong.

It was twilight on the vast plain, north of the Gila. Now the two principal parties had visibly changed their positions. The Indians were quite near, having gained two miles in light—a vast gain; they must have ridden like the wind, or the sorrel mustang must have lagged.

The last was the case. From some hidden reason Dimple

had lost his swift run, and was going at a faltering canter—he was unaccountably fatigued or injured. She could hear faintly the hideous yells behind—a mile and a half distant.

At this, with her last hope giving way, she plied the whip.

The mustang obeyed, and for a few lengths galloped briskly, but soon collapsed, and feebly cantered on. She felt terrified at the thought of captivity and prayed for rescue.

It came. The twilight was almost over, then pitchy darkness would shield her from her red enemies. The moon rose about three hours after sundown—she could easily elude them until that time; then, perhaps, she would be safe.

Another circumstance, far more potent, was in her favor. The soil of the plain, baked hard after months of drought, left no impression of the mustang's hoof, consequently she could not be traced by the hoof-marks. It was not probable, after having eluded them, that in this wide, vast plain they could chance upon her again. So, if she succeeded in escaping, for the present she was in comparative safety.

She succeeded. The darkness swiftly gathered down over the plain; she lost sight of her pursuers, though still hearing their hideous yells; and they, in turn, lost sight of her.

Fifteen minutes later, on pausing and waiting a few moments, Kissie heard them gallop by in the darkness, not ten rods away. Then she turned and rode for an hour in an opposite direction; for the present she was safe.

Alighting, she left Dimple to graze at will on the scanty herbage; and, conscious the timid mustang would awaken her by stamping, should danger come, lay down, and, completely worn out, fell into a light, troubled sleep.

The chase had not amounted to much—the odds, large ones, being in her favor; but while she had escaped from them, she had ridden many miles further from her friends.

Alone in the desert, guarded by the wary, timid pony, she slept; and the night was dark and gloomy in the Land of Silence—for she was within its ghostly border.

CHAPTER IV.

CIMARRON JACK.

As the first gray streaks of dawn slanted across the eastern horizon, the little camp on the Gila was astir, and the members were bustling about. Anxious faces they were, their movements were hurried and nervous; and the general aspect of the camp was one of alarm and anxiety.

There is evidently a great commotion in camp; ever and anon the men scan the surrounding horizon; and one and all wear the same anxious look; what is the matter?

The question is answered almost as soon as asked, as a cry arises from one of the watchers. The others start to their feet (they are at present bolting a hasty breakfast) and following their companion's gaze see a horseman coming along the river bank. He is quite near, having been coming under the bank, and consequently unseen by them.

"Simpson! the guide!" shout one or two voices; then two others add, with a groan, "and alone."

"And alone!" cry the rest, gloomily.

The guide was coming slowly, his mustang lagging with drooping head, as if just freed from a hard, long ride. The guide, too, though generally reserved, was moody, and wore a sort of apologetic, shame-faced air.

Joel Wheeler and young Carpenter sprung to meet him.

"Have you seen her?" asked Mr. Wheeler, though knowing the question was a superfluous one. The guide shook his head.

"Nor any trace of her?" hastily added Carpenter. Simpson slowly shook his head again.

"Not at all—no sign?"

"Nary mark, sign, trail, trace—nary nuthin'. Blast the luck!" he added, in sudden ire; "I've done rode over every squar' inch of this kentry sence last night, fur miles around. She ain't nowhar 'round lyar, that's sartain shure."

It was only too evident the guide spoke truthfully. His

fatigued, travel-worn steed, panting deeply, and his own wearied air, showed he had ridden far and swiftly.

"Yer see'd no one, then?" asked Burt Scranton.

"Who sed I never see'd no one?" hastily retorted Simpson.

"You did."

"I didn't!"

"What did you say, then?"

"Thet I hedn't see'd the lady—and I hev'n't."

"You have seen some one, then?" asked Carpenter.

"Yes, I hev."

"Whom?"

The guide brought his fist down on his knees:

"A sperrit."

"A spirit? Nonsense! Where?"

"Up hyar, a piece—in a kentry called the Land of Silence."

"Ah! the Land of Silence," and Burt slowly shook his head. "I've heerd on that place."

The Canadians looked incredulous and grinned. Seeing them in the act, the guide, nettled, burst out:

"Yes, and yer may jist bet yer hides I don't want ter see it ag'in, now. By thunder! ef I warn't skeered I never was, and every one of ye's heerd of Simpson, the guide—every one of ye know 't I ain't no coward, neither."

"What did it look like?" asked Kit Duncan.

The guide slowly dismounted, and flinging his arm over his saddle, said:

"It war the ghost of the Trailer."

"The Trailer!" echoed Burt.

"Yes, the Trailer. Jest the same as he allus war, in his peaked hat and black feather, jest the same as ever he war, armed ter kill, he rode his old black hoss right by me, not ten feet off. Gee-whittaker! I ked hev touched him."

"Did he speak?" asked Louis Robidoux, in a quizzical manner.

"Thet's the wust of it. When he got clos't ter me, he turned his face too-ward me. Gee-crymini! how white his face war."

"What did he say?"

"'You air ridin' late, Tim Simpson.'"

"Is that all?"

"Gee-whiz! ain't thet enough?"

"Why didn't you shoot him?"

"I war too skeered—I know'd 'twar no mortal man."

"How did you know?"

"Cuss yer! a woman's nuthin' ter yer on the ke-westion. How did I know? Wal, the Trailer's got a grudge ag'in' me, an' ef he'd been a man don't yer see he'd 'a' plugged me afore I see'd him? He war a fee-rocious man, thet Trailer, and ef he war alive when I met him, he'd 'a' sure plugged me. He didn't, and thet shows he's dead. Durn it! I *know* he's dead; Pedro Felipe killed him in the Land of Silence, over a year ago. I see'd his skeleton onc't."

"Holloa!" exclaimed Burt, suddenly. "Look thar!" and he pointed down the river. All eyes followed the direction.

A man mounted on a trim bay horse was seen advancing at a long, swinging lope, quite near. He had drawn close during the dialogue, unnoticed, and was coming boldly on, as if he feared no danger. Simpson immediately recognized him.

"Cimarron Jack!" he cried. "Gee-menentli! hooray!"

The rider stopped and drew a revolver.

"Who is there?" he demanded, in a rich, musical voice, with a purity of accent rarely seen on the southern plains.

"Tim Simpson, the guide!"

"Is that so? Hurrah! I'm Cimarron Jack, the tiger, and I'm a thorough-bred from Tartary, I tell *you*."

Belting his revolver, he struck spurs to his splendid bay, and the next moment was heartily shaking Simpson by the hand, wrenching it violently.

"I'm an elephant, *I am*!" he shouted, in stentorian tones, addressing the entire party. "I'm a Feejee dancing-master, and where's the man that'll say 'boo' to this chap? I'm the fellow who killed cock-robin!"

"You are jest in time, Jack," said the guide. "We want yer ter help us."

Nowhere in America do men come so quickly "to the point," as on the vast South-western plains. Meet a friend you have not seen for years—he is in trouble, mayhap. You have scarcely time to greet him before he informs you of his embarrassment, and requests your immediate assistance. You

instantly, if you are a "plainsman," grant his request—it is often policy to do so.

Cimarron Jack was a noted ranger and inexplicable man. While his whole conversation was a series of boastings and vaunts, while a more conceited man perhaps never breathed, he had one trait which was the very opposite, paradoxical as it may appear—he believed that others were as keen and shrewd as himself, and, when on the war-path, believed his enemy as bold and crafty as himself—the predominating trait of the shrewdest detectives in the world.

To describe him, his dress and manner, were a long and hard task. Closely-knit, six feet and three inches in height, with the arm of a blacksmith, and the leg of a cassowary, he was a formidable enemy when aroused, and he was a man of iron nerve. Withal, he was at times as tender as a woman, and was always upright and honest.

Imagine a giant on a splendid bay stallion, with weapons of all sorts, sizes and nationalities slung about him ; with red, green, blue, gray—in short, every color—feathers twisted into his clothing, long boots, painted in different colors—looking like an insane person—imagine this, and you are distantly acquainted with Cimarron Jack, the ranger, hunter and Indian-fighter.

"What do you want with the king pin of all rifle-shots? Show me a star, and I'll knock the twinkle out of it with a Number One buckshot."

The party stared at him aghast. Never before had they seen such a fantastical braggadocio. Had they never before heard of him they would have deemed him a raving maniac, and would have given him a wide berth. But every one who was in that country at that time—184—, had heard of the far-famed Cimarron Jack.

"What do you want with the people's favorite?" he demanded. "Come—the court is impatient."

Joel Wheeler stepped forward and said : "Sir, we are—"

"Don't 'sir' me!" interrupted the ranger. "I'm Cimarron Jack, and I'm the cock of the walk."

"Well then, Cimarron Jack, my daughter strayed away last night and we fear she is lost—indeed, we are positive she is. The country is infested with Indians—"

"You can't tell me any thing about Indians, for my education in that direction is finished. Hurrah! three genuine cheers and a tiger for the man that can't be beat!"

Snatching his *sombrero* from his head, he swung it aloft, cheering himself lustily. Then he replaced the hat and listened gravely.

"It is only too evident that Christina is lost. Cognizant that the country is swarming with hostile Apaches and Comanches, we are very much alarmed. You are a noted scout and tracker—I've frequently heard of you; and if you will lend us your assistance in searching for her, I will cheerfully pay any price you may ask."

"Count me in—just score the grizzly-tamer on the rolls. But stop!" he added, his face becoming grave, and addressing Simpson. "Is the beauteous maid fair to look upon?"

"Ef thar ever was an angel on airth, she's the one," emphatically pronounced the guide.

"Then hurrah! blood raw, blood raw! cut your palate out and eat it—you are just shouting I will. I'm a thoroughbred, sired by Colossus."

"Are you willing to go, then?" demanded Carpenter.

"You're talking I am."

"Well, just tell the men to hitch up the horses, Burt."

Scranton turned to execute the order, and Mr. Wheeler called a consultation of the principal men, Cimarron Jack, Carpenter and Simpson, to decide upon the most feasible plan for recovering Kissie. He was much alarmed. Although for years accustomed to Kissie's vagaries and erratic wanderings, he was now alarmed in good earnest. She had often ridden away from the train on some expedition, but she had always returned punctually. But now they were in a country overrun with hostile, ferocious Indians, who were capable of any fiendish deed, and quite unscrupulous enough to execute it.

But there were other dangers near by, if not quite as potent. Here in this hot, vast plain water was scarce, though the country was "cut up" by creeks. These, however, were entirely dry nine months in the year, and this season was uncommonly dry. Then, too, savage and large beasts roamed the plain. The large gray wolf hunted in packs, ready when

hungry to follow and run down a human being ; the grizzly often came down from his cave in the mountains to prey upon the animals in the plain ; and many other animals, quite as ferocious and cunning, roamed the illimitable waste.

Should she avoid all these dangers ; should she elude the fierce Apache, the gray wolf and grizzly bear ; should she be fortunate enough to discover water, a thing scarcely possible, there was another danger to be dreaded—hunger.

She was not armed, and procuring food on the barren plain, without the necessary weapons, was impossible. She could procure no food from the herbage—it was scant, dry and short. She was undoubtedly in a desperate predicament.

Mr. Wheeler revolved these several contingencies in his mind, and grew sad and moody. Carpenter noticed his dejection, and though anxious and sad himself, endeavored to cheer him.

“Come, cheer up,” he said, laying his hand upon his shoulder. “The case may not be so desperate after all. While there is life there is hope, you know.”

“Sam, I know you can sympathize with me—you are the only one who can appreciate my agony, for it is positive agony. To think of the dear child, heaven knows where, suffering and heart-sick, almost distracts me. Sam, I fear the worst.”

“Come, sir, come ; you must not talk like that. She only rode away after a rabbit—she, mayhap, has become confused, perhaps lost. But the sorrel mustang is sagacious, and doubtless ere this is scenting back toward us. I know he will come back if she will give him his head.”

“A thing she will not think of doing,” replied Mr. Wheeler. “If she is lost, she is lost, indeed—there is no end to this vast plain.”

“But she must have left a trail, and with two such famous men as Cimarron Jack and Simpson, we can surely trail her. Those two men are prodigies, sir—they are famous even among their fellow-countrymen. Cheer up, sir—see, they are ready to start. Shall I saddle your horse, sir?”

“If you will, Sam. I am so perplexed I am fit for nothing.”

“I will do it, sir. Take my word for it, sir, we will soon find her.”

"God grant it!" was the fervent reply.

The result of the council was this: the guide, Cimarron Jack, Mr. Wheeler, and Sam, were to ride toward the northwest, if possible on Kissie's trail. Burt Scranton and the teamster would follow with the wagons. The trailing party would proceed moderately, while the wagons would move at a much faster rate than usual to keep in sight. This was done to avoid being separated by Indians, should they meet with any. This arrangement (Cimarron Jack's suggestion) afterward proved a wise one. But more anon.

"Are you ready?" said Jack, vaulting into his saddle. "If you are, follow the man who can thrash his weight in wild-cats with a ton of grizzlies thrown in to make the skirmish interesting."

"Yer ain't quit yer bragging yet, I see," remarked the guide.

"Bragging! *me* brag? d'ye mean it? whiz! I'll cut your palate out and eat it—yes, I will, you know that yourself. Blood raw, blood raw! I'm the man that never says 'boo' to a lame chicken."

"Hyar's her trail," observed the guide.

Jack vaulted backward to the ground, examined it, swore an oath or two, lit his pipe, boasted a little, then remounted and rode off on the faint, very dim trail, with the wagons rumbling after; the search had commenced.

The guide ever and anon raised his head and peered off into the northern, purple-tinted distance, as if half afraid of seeing some disagreeable object. However, he held his peace and relapsed into his usual, but for some time, abandoned taciturnity. Must the truth be spoken? The guide was alarmed.

CHAPTER V.

A DEAD MAN'S GHOST.

ON the day after Pedro left the Gila he arrived at the old robber hillock. As he rode up to it, he mechanically looked for a skeleton he expected to see there—the skeleton of the Trailer. To his surprise not a bone of it was there, where he left the body.

Could the Trailer have come to life? impossible—he was killed instantly. Pedro had shot him from behind, the ball entering his back and penetrating to his heart. No—it could not be possible.

But the skeleton—where was it? of course the body had been devoured by carnivorous animals—as a matter of course it had been; but animals never swallow the bones—they should be there still.

Pedro was perplexed and looked off over the plain, as if for an answer. He got none. Everywhere, in every direction, it was the same monotonous expanse—always yellow, dry and quiet, always spectral and forbidding; he was in the heart of the Land of Silence.

“The skeleton—where in the world can it be?” he muttered, glancing about. “Curse it, I begin to feel awkward and uneasy already. This is a cursed quiet place—this plain; and such a name as it has, too; just the place for spirits to roam about in. I am beginning to believe they have tampered with the Trailer’s bones—I do, indeed. Ha! what’s that?”

He had espied something white at a distance away—something which looked dry and bleached, like bones long exposed to the elements. He rode slowly toward it; it (or they) was a bunch of bones clustered together, as if thrown hastily in a pile.

He took them one by one in his hands and narrowly examined them. They were human, he could tell—might they not be the Trailer’s? They were much too small, he thought,

still one is deceived oftentimes by appearances. The Trailer had been a large man—a giant; these bones were rather small.

Still he knew he had not seen them when here a year ago—they had not been there then. These bones were about a year old; that is, exposed to the elements. A year ago he had killed the Trailer, the last robber on the spot—the bones must be his.

"They are the Trailer's—they must be," he said, and idly kicking them, mounted and rode back to the hill or mound.

To describe this singular place would be a long task, so we will skim briefly over it. About forty feet long by twenty in height, it was a mere shell—probably a hiding-place contrived centuries ago. It was entered in this manner by Pedro.

Scattered over the surface of the knoll were a large number of flat stones. Lifting one of the largest of these, he hurled it against one imbedded in the ground, dented in the form of a cross. The ground suddenly gave way and disclosed an opening sufficient to admit a horse.

It was a plank-trap; cunningly covered with earth, its existence would never have been suspected by the uninitiated. It was hung on stout leathern hinges fastened to two upright posts.

The hollow hill was divided into two chambers, one within the other. The first was dark and was only lighted by the opening of the door. The floor was the ground, the walls the hillside, the ceiling the summit. The only furniture it contained was a huge water-bucket, a rusty gun or two, several tattered blankets, and a resinous, partially-consumed torch.

Pedro noticed this torch, and his eyes sparkled.

"Just where I left it a year ago—in this chink. Now I am certain I was the last one here—now am I certain of finding the hidden treasure."

He lighted the torch, and after looking out into the plain, started toward the inner chamber. But suddenly stopping, he went back to the entrance.

"I might as well bring the horse inside now," he said. "Perhaps I may be obliged to spend a week here. He will be out of sight, too."

Going out he brought in the horse, and then tightly closed the entrance. Then his eyes fell on the water-vessel.

"I wish I had some water," he said; "and no doubt the horse thinks the same. But there is a stream ten miles north—Alkali Creek. The water is not very good, but it is wet. I will go after I've searched awhile."

Unsaddling the horse, and leaving him to roam at will about the chamber, he again took up the torch and went to the entrance of the inner one.

This was a mere slit in the hillside, barely large enough for him to enter. However, his pliant body enabled him to glide through, and standing in the entrance, he threw the light over the apartment.

It was empty, just as he had expected. It was unchanged, too—further evidence that there had been no one there since he had left. His spirits rose at every step, and his way was becoming certain.

This chamber was somewhat larger than the other, and was lighter, the chinks above being larger. It was also scantily furnished, and in the same manner as the first.

A pile of blankets lay in one corner, and were evidently long unused. A single gun stood by them—a rifle. Otherwise the room was empty.

Pedro, after satisfying himself as to other occupants, with his habitual energy began at once to work. Drawing his revolver, he hastily uncapped the tubes, then, lighted by his torch, commenced to sound the wall, the ceiling, the floor—in fact, everything which might conceal the treasure he knew was there.

Outside the sun still shone upon the bare plain, blinding with its heat the few small animals which stole about, the only moving objects on the plain.

The *only* moving objects? Not so; there was another one—a man riding a black horse. Several miles away from the hillock, he was coming, at a slow walk, from the south; going north and to the hillock.

An hour passed. Pedro was working steadily inside, at intervals muttering disjointed sentences. The solitary rider drew near, and halted close to the hillock.

He was dressed in a tight-fitting suit of buck-skin, and in

his black, conical hat, a black plume drooped. Armed to the teeth, he was a desperate-appearing person. His face, bearing the marks of license to strong and evil passions, was pale in the extreme—even ghastly.

He halted before the entrance, and just then Pedro exclaimed below—he was excited about something. Then he rode round to the opposite side of the hillock, and drawing up, facing it, sat like a statue on his black horse.

A fierce cry came from the cavern—a cry of wild delight. This was followed by a series of disjointed exclamations, expressive of the wildest joy. Then came hurried tramping to and fro—then dead silence. Outside the rider still sat on his sable steed, and remained grim and quiet, never changing a muscle. All was quiet in the Land of Silence.

It was toward the middle of the afternoon when Pedro burst out of the entrance gesticulating extravagantly, and fairly shouting under the influence of some strong emotion. In his hand he held his horse-blanket, tied into a rude bag; it was loaded with something that chinked musically.

“Found! found!” he cried. “What fortune—what extraordinary luck! Only three hours’ searching, too. Oh, holy mother! what shall I do with all this wealth? Pedro, Pedro Felipe, you are as rich as the richest. Blessed be all the saints! what fortune, what fortune!”

This grave, demure man of forty, fairly danced in excitement, and shook the bag violently.

Chink, chink! a musical rattle that. More than one man has gone crazy over less. Huzzah! huzzah! the treasure is found.

He has feasted his eyes on it before; but, wild with excitement, can not keep his eyes off from it. In his agitation he had forgotten his horse, and with the bag on his shoulder, had been starting on foot for Mexico. But now he sunk on his knees, and opening the blanket-bag, shook it.

Heavens! what a sight. Rolling out in a sparkling cascade came coin, gold and silver, ornaments of the same metals, costly watches, splendid rings, and guards, and above all, gleaming, sparkling diamonds. Diamonds set in magnificent

rings ; diamonds garnishing costly brooches ; diamonds cut and rough, large and tiny ; what a fortune, what beautiful, bewitching riches was there.

Spread out on the ground, Pedro gazed fascinated upon his precious treasure, and well he might. Here a deep amethyst glimmered and shone, hob-nobbing, as it were, with a brilliant diamond ; yonder a sparkling seal clung closely with a shining watch guard. Diamonds were sprinkled about pell-mell among all sorts and sizes of costly jewels, expensive watches, and piles of golden and silver coin of large denominations ; here a solitary ruby flashed and shimmered ; but, above all, outstripping all, was a huge topaz, mocking the sun by its deep, transparent yellow tint ; it was a gem among gems.

Pedro had not formed any idea of the value of his treasure—his brain was so demented he could not have counted twenty correctly. But he saw the coins were all among the highest ever sent from the mint, and nearly all gold ; but he had not the slightest idea of the value of the jewels—he only knew he was immensely rich.

“ Ah, my yellow, shining, pretty pets ! ” he exclaimed, filling the bag again. “ My darlings ! you have made me the richest man in the wide world. Brave, yellow, sparkling boys ! ”

A horse stamped close by. He listened intently.

Another stamp and a shrill neigh from a strange horse. Pedro turned sick, his brain reeled, and a deadly nausea seized him.

Suddenly recovering, he threw the bag into the entrance, and drew his jeweled dagger—his rifle was inside.

“ Who’s there ? ” he hoarsely said, peering off into the plain. “ Speak ! man or ghost ! who is near—who is there ? ”

Nothing—no one ; the plain is bare. All is quiet in the Land of Silence.

“ Murder ! help ! who’s there ? Oh, heaven, my gold ! ”

He saw the plain was bare, and that he was alone. He drew a breath of relief—might he not have been deceived ?

Perhaps. He prayed so. But stay—the hillock hid a part of the plain from view. He would ascend it and discover evil if it was at hand.

With a hoarse cry he brandished his dagger, and with two gigantic strides stood on the summit.

But only for a moment, he stood there with a pale, terrified face, staring eye and shaking limbs. Then reeling, with a loud cry he rushed down into the cave and closed the entrance, terrified almost beyond his senses.

What was the matter—what had happened? Enough. There, on his old black horse, under his plumed black hat, sat *the ghost of the Trailer*.

CHAPTER VI.

KISSIE FINDS A FRIEND.

PEDRO sat behind the closed entrance, lowering savagely through the glimmering chinks, and almost beside himself with astonishment, vague fear, and wonder. He had recovered his gun and was clutching it, ready to fire at the smallest rustle above; his precious treasure formed a costly seat, on which he squatted; afraid of the cave, afraid of the darkness, the ghost, his own horse, and even of himself.

Do not infer from this that Pedro was a coward. On the contrary, he was brave—a bolder man never drew breath. He was far famed for his bravery. But, “put yourself in his place,” and cease to wonder at his alarm.

An hour passed, during which he fancied he heard a slight noise overhead. But if there was one, it was slight, scarcely discernible. He began to regain his habitual equanimity, and to try and laugh down his fears. But the latter was no easy task. To see the perfect form of a man he had shot through the heart a year ago—to see him mounted on the same steed he had dropped him from—to see his wicked, gleaming eye fixed upon him in deadly, unrelenting hate—and above all, to meet him at *this* place, in the country noted for its specters, was enough, as he strongly declared, “to scare the Old Nick out of ten years’ wickedness.”

Plucking up courage, he advanced to open the trap and

peer out. Just then he heard a footfall above—he drew back again, seized with fear.

The footfall became two, then three, then grew into a succession of patters. He knew the sound—it was a horse. He did not stop to conjecture—he did not hesitate or draw a timid breath ; but angry at himself for being alarmed, boldly threw open the trap, and with ready rifle, peered out.

His eyes fell upon a fair young girl coming directly toward him on a sorrel mustang, the latter apparently wandering aimlessly at an easy amble. Her eyes were fixed on the distant plain beyond the hillock, and were wandering, as if she saw nothing to attract her attention.

“It is strange she does not see it!” observed Pedro—“very strange. But stay! the hillock is higher than its head, and so she does not perceive it. But she will—she will.”

But she did not, and came on directly toward the entrance. Suddenly, when quite close, the mustang snorted, tossed her head, and shied away from something in front of her.

“Ah!” he muttered, “then it was no optical illusion—it is, in truth, a spirit.”

But he was deceived. If the mustang saw the form behind the hill, the lady did not, and being higher than her steed had a better opportunity for discovering it.

“Be quiet, Dimple!” commanded the lady. “It is only some large burrow—it is nothing to alarm you. Be quiet, I say!”

Pedro stared. From where she was now (the mustang having darted to a point which allowed a full view of the hillock) she could have easily seen the form had he been there. But she did not, and of course he was not in sight—the pony was alarmed at the yawning entrance, which showed gloomily against the yellow hillock.

Pedro's fears were over. Wondering why a lady—a white and beautiful American lady—should be alone on this wild, sterile plain, he resolved to make himself known. Perhaps she was in distress—mayhap she had just escaped from captivity and needed assistance.

Gallantry was one of his predominating traits.

Casting aside his weapons, and wearing an easy, good-natured air, which became him, he stepped carelessly out in full

view. Lifting his sombrero, he said, with an assuring smile :

" Senorita, your servant."

Snort ! The mustang was twenty yards away in five seconds, and the lady, unseated, was on the ground, wildly alarmed, but not injured ; the timid mustang had thrown her in its sudden fright.

She arose and fled toward her mustang, but the treacherous animal galloped away, and halting a hundred yards distant, tossed her head and regarded the strange man wildly. Seeing she could not recover her steed in her present state of mind, she turned to Pedro, doubting and fearing him. He saw she mistrusted him, and again raising his sombrero, again bowed low.

" Fear not, senorita—fear not ; I am a friend."

" A friend ? Who are you ?"

" Pedro Felipe, senorita. Do you need assistance ?"

" Oh, yes, sir ; I am in great trouble. I am lost from my friends. I was chased by Indians last night. I am very hungry and tired ; I have not tasted food since yesterday at noon."

Pedro, eying her admiringly, noticed her sweet face was pale and worn. Ever ready to assist a fellow-creature, he started toward the entrance.

" Enter, senorita, enter. But stay," he added, in a low tone ; " do you see any thing on the other side of the hill ?"

" No, sir—nothing. No one is visible."

" It is well. Senorita, if you will come in here you will find food, such as it is. There are blankets, also, if you need rest."

But she hung back. She feared to enter that strange, yawning hole with this man, even if he did look and act like an honest man.

" My pony, Dimple," she said, hesitatingly. " I am afraid she will go astray."

" Never fear, senorita—I will bring her back to you, if she does."

" But—but—"

" Ah I perceive, senorita—you wrong me. I have been

too long a companion and servant of my kind master in Mexico—Senor Martinez—to harm a lady. I—”

“Why! are you the Pedro that lives at that grand old place? Why, our farm was quite close to it! My father is Mr. Wheeler.”

“Ah! then I am fortunate in having an opportunity to serve you. Your party is on their way north, is it not?”

“Yes, sir. Do you know any of them?”

“Only Simpson, the guide. He is an old friend of mine. Many is the time we have fled from Apaches. I started from the hacienda on the morning you started for the north. I saw your party, several days ago, down on the Santa Cruz river.”

“Then you will help me to find my friends?”

“Assuredly, senorita. Come in and rest. My accommodations are poor, but they are better than none. Come in, senorita.”

No longer she feared to enter that forbidding aperture, but led by Pedro, walked in. The mustang, seeing her mistress disappear, came slowly toward the entrance.

“Why, what a dismal, gloomy place,” said Kissie, timidly halting in the entrance. “What is it—who lives here?”

“It is an old outlaw den,” replied Pedro. “But no outlaws occupy it now—its only resident is your servant.”

Much she marveled, but she did not ask any questions, as she was faint from lack of nourishment. Pedro, for security's sake, led her into the second chamber, and shaking up the tattered, musty blankets, bade her rest while he procured food, he going out for the purpose.

She reclined on the soft blankets, greatly surprised at the strange events in which she had participated. But she did so unaccompanied by any feelings of alarm or of grief, for now she had found a haven of rest.

She sunk into a dreamy doze, delicious for its being indulged in perfect safety. She had heard of the man outside—she was aware he was a far-famed and respected scout and warrior; she knew he would protect her. She could hear him in the next room stirring about, whistling under his breath, and the savory odor of roasting meat floated to her nostrils. A lingering trace of uneasiness alone remained—she knew her friends would be alarmed about her.

This latter feeling was not strong enough to seriously alarm her, as she conceived it an easy task for them to find her. Mingling with it was a delicious sense of security and peace, of rest and nourishment, and the savory smell of the adjoining cookery. Gradually these blended into one feeling; Pedro's whistle outside became more melodious and softer—the dull, gloomy air of the dark apartment soothed her, and she fell asleep.

Pedro, as he cooked his bit of venison (he had killed an antelope when on the Gila), reflected and pondered, and his thoughts shaped themselves into words.

"She is asleep—I can hear her breathe. It is strange, very strange, that she did not see it. It was no mistake of mine, that I know. What, then, was it? The Trailer's ghost.

"Pshaw! I killed him a year ago, and saw him fall dead with my own eyes. It can not—it can not be.

"But I saw him. Ah, that is only too certain. Sitting on his old black horse, under that waving black plume, and in the same old dress. I saw him—I *know* I saw him. Pedro Felipe, there is no fighting away the fact—you are haunted."

He shuddered, strong man as he was, and going to the entrance, looked out. Still the hot breeze came from the south, still the hot sun stared down upon the yellow plain, still all was quiet. Only the mustang was in sight, browsing at a little distance, with his head turned toward the east.

"I must lariat that mustang," said Pedro. "There are too many Indians about for him to show our retreat. Yes, I will lariat him."

Perhaps one motive for doing so was, that going out he might peer over the hill. He dreaded a second appearance of the apparition, and though he would not acknowledge it to himself, cordially feared it. It was not to his discredit, however.

He took his lariat, or lasso, from his saddle, which lay on the floor, the horse lying near. Then he stepped out, still keeping one corner of his eye toward the summit of the hill.

Suddenly he stopped.

"What if she should awake and discover my treasure!" he thought, trembling for its safety, though he knew she was perfectly to be trusted.

It was lying in a corner still, in the bag. He threw the water-bucket, a blanket and his saddle over it.

"That will suffice for the present," he said; then casting an eye toward the inner room, went out with his lariat.

The mustang still browsed, tail toward him. It was an excellent opportunity for a capture, and he would profit by it. So, making a running-noose at one end, he coiled his lariat, and taking the coil in his hand, began to swing it over his head. At the same time he allowed the noose full play, by this means increasing its size until it became several feet in diameter. Such is the apparently simple manner of throwing the lasso.

The noose became larger and wider, the amount of rope in his hand became less; in another moment the noose would be over the animal's head.

It did not leave his hand. Just before he had got ready to let it fly, a voice close by said:

"Aim well, Pedro Felipe."

He started, dropped his rope, and stared round. He was alone—no one had spoken. Was it imagination?—the mustang still browsed—she had not heard it. It was a false alarm.

Again he picked up his rope. Again the voice spoke, this time harshly.

"Take care, Pedro!"

Dropping his rope, he flew to the summit and looked over the plain. No one was in sight—no apparition, no Indian, no human being.

Then with a pale face he darted toward the entrance, with the ejaculated words:

"The voice of the Trailer!"

The trap-door rung harshly as he slammed it to from the inside. The mustang heard the sound, tossed his head, and galloped away a short distance, then stopped and looked at the hillock.

It was bare—no one was in sight. Relieved of her sudden fear, she dropped her head and grazed again. The sun slowly set over the Land of Silence.

Who spoke?

The man with the black plume in his conical hat.

CHAPTER VII.

"APACHES!"

THE pursuing band wound away over the plain, now, at four hours from sunrise, invisible from the banks of the Gila.

They were, as has been said, divided into two separate parties. That of Cimarron Jack was in advance, the riders urging on their steeds at a swift amble. The wagons behind under charge of Burt Scranton, rattled along merrily, draw by horses kept at a slow trot.

"I say," said Jack, as they trotted on, "we are nearly into the Land of Silence, now, ain't we?"

This remark was addressed to the guide. He nodded.

"And now we've got to look out for Apaches."

"No 'Patchies hyar."

"Yes, there are."

"I know better. Never come inter this kentry. Too dry."

"Well, there are Apaches prowling about now—that I know to be a fact."

"Know more'n I do, then."

"You bet I do. Hooray! three cheers for the man who can clean out a whole jail-full of prize-fighters; a tiger for the stoutest, smartest man in the world. I can thrash a jungle-full of gorillas, myself. I tell *you*. I'm the man that can't be fazed, myself; and I'm the cock of the walk."

"I'm sick of thet durned braggin'," growled Simpson. "Heerd northin' else sence I fust see'd yer."

"And you are liable to continue hearing it, too."

"Darn me ef I kain't stop it."

"Yes you can—with a big copper."

"Well, I kin."

"Le's see you try it."

"Hark!" suddenly cried Carpenter. "Was not that a gun-shot?"

The friendly disputants ceased their strife, and halting and

turning in their saddles, listened long and earnestly. The train was not in sight, having descended into a sort of dry slough which ran across the plain.

"False alarm," declared Simpson, turning to continue the trail. But Cimarron Jack disagreed with him.

"Tim, I saw Apache Jack up by Comanche Rock day before yesterday, and he warned me of a band of Apaches who were out on a maraud, down in this direction. What he says is gospel."

"Durned ef it ain't ! I giv' in," said Simpson. His confidence in Apache Jack was unlimited.

"The old boy was looking rather fazed," continued Jack. "He told me he had only just given them the slip, after a run of thirty miles."

"Hark !" sharply commanded Mr. Wheeler. "I'm sure I heard a gun behind."

"I thought I did, too," said Sam.

A puff of white smoke arose from the crest of a small knoll, half a league behind ; then a man was seen to spring on the summit and wave his hat frantically.

The eagle eye and electric brain of Cimarron Jack took in the situation at once. He struck his steel spurs sharply into the blood-bay's flanks.

"Come on !" he shouted, galloping toward the gesticulating man. "There's something wrong with the train. Come on ! follow the tiger-cat !"

They followed, pell-mell, plying the spur. As if cognizant of the importance of speed, the horses bent their heads and fairly flew ; while their riders kept their eyes upon the man on the knoll.

Suddenly he disappeared and a new object came in sight. Afar off on the plain, beyond the invisible train, came a man on a galloping animal. He was followed by another and more, all shooting out from behind a distant ridge.

"'Patchees !" yelled Simpson. "They air a-makin' fur the train !"

The guide was right. The train was halted behind the knoll, and the Apaches were galloping toward it. They had evidently been following the trail, as they were coming from the south-east.

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"Hurry!" cried Sam. "We will have to fly to save the train." And as he spoke he bent over his "clay-bank's" neck as if to accelerate his speed.

The knoll was quite near now, being not more than three hundred yards distant. The coming savages were at least a mile away. The whites had the start.

A minute more and they dashed up in a body to the knoll.

It was as they had expected; the train was grouped behind it, every one being in hapless confusion with the exception of Burt, who was loudly swearing at the utter disregard of his orders by the two Robidoux.

Duncan was scuttling about among his tin dishes and kettles in his wagon, trying to find his favorite weapon—a dull butcher-knife, with a blade like a hand-saw. The utmost confusion prevailed.

However, the arrival of the main body in some degree quieted the teamsters and restored order.

Suddenly the coming Apaches, now about a half-mile distant, drew up their mustangs, and grouping, stared keenly at the train. They had seen the horsemen suddenly arrive to sustain the small band they were swooping down upon.

Cimarron Jack was in his element. Taking, with the characteristic promptness of a veteran Indian-fighter, advantage of their hesitation, he sprung from his horse.

"Now, fly 'round!" he commanded. "Stir your stumps, you fellows!" pointing to the Canadians. "You, Louis, drive your team ahead ten feet!"

The man obeyed, quieted by the magnetic influence which Jack always possessed when in danger.

"Now, Duncan—blast your nervous, excitable hide! drive alongside Louis!"

But Duncan paid no attention, searching, in an agony of haste, for his lost knife.

Burt promptly performed his task. The other Canadian, with more coolness than the other drivers, seeing what was desired, waited for no orders, but drove his wagon in a line with the others.

"Now all hands get to work and unbitch the horses. Don't

be in a hurry ; buckles can't be managed without coolness and deliberation.

The men went to work with dispatch, yet coolly, and in a few moments the horses were detached from the wagons.

"Now, you drivers take the horses aside, and the rest of us will draw the wagons together."

The Canadians did as commanded, and the remainder drew the wagons together ; then the horses were tied firmly to the wheels on the side next the knoll. Now they were in quite a snug and secure fort, with a barricade of wagons in front, and a small hill behind.

After this short but highly necessary work was finished, Cimarron Jack looked closely at his rifle, desiring the others to do the same. He carefully reloaded his "Colt's six-shooters," and laid them before him on the wheel-hub.

"Now, boys," he said, "we are in tolerable circumstances for the present, but there is no knowing how long we will remain so. Rot those cussed devils out there ! there's an army of 'em !"

"Fifteen," corrected Simpson.

"Fifteen to seven. Oh, that ain't as bad as it might be."

"What a large fellow that is, yonder, to one side," observed Carpenter, indicating a powerful, stalwart savage, prominent among the rest.

"Cheyenne," remarked the guide, taking a huge bite from a "plug o' Navy," which he always carried.

"Comanche !" corrected Jack. "He's no Apache—he isn't built like one. Tear my lion's heart out, but I believe I know him," he suddenly added.

"Durned ef I don't, too !" declared Simpson, watching him narrowly.

"It's Red-Knife, the renegade."

"K'rect !"

"Who is he ?" inquired Mr. Wheeler.

"Red-Knife, the Comanche renegade—a notorious, murdering old rat !" replied Jack. "He's the worst Indian on the plains, and 'give up' is something he does not know. Kicked out of his own tribe he joined the Apaches, and since has

gained a reputation for cruelty and cunning far above any of the others."

"We are in danger, then."

"Danger! Well, I should remark. But look yonder—what in the name of Cimarron Jack, the cock of the walk, does that painted devil mean?"

All eyes were turned at once toward the savages. Before stationary, they were now prancing and capering about, spreading like a bird's wing, then folding again, ever prancing and curveting. Only the chief, Red-Knife, remained at rest. After seeing his brother Ishmaelites wheel and curve about him for some time, he dismounted, cast his weapons on the ground and slowly stalked toward the barricade.

"He's a fool!" whispered Burt to Sam, as he drew within rifle-range. "Fust thing he'll know, he'll find hisself dead, if ever Simpson or t'other draws bead on him."

"He's going to palaver," remarked Jack.

The savage drew quite close, until he halted within long pistol-range. Then, spreading his arms and throwing back his head, he cried out:

"Are the pale-faces women, that they seek to hide? Are they coyotes, that they burrow when danger comes? Are they fools, that they know not that Red-Knife is the chief of the plains—that he is not to be foiled?"

He spoke in the Spanish tongue with a good tone and accent. Long intercourse with the Mexicans had improved his tongue.

He received no answer; he went on.

"Are the pale-faces dumb, that they do not reply? Ugh they are dogs."

"He thinks we are greasers—he does, by Cimarron Jack, the god of war! Well, let him discover his mistake—he will do so before long," remarked Jack.

"Le's pepper him, Jack," said the guide.

"No; let him talk. If he thinks we are Mexicans he will charge—then we will give him a little lead to digest."

"Will the pale faces surrender?" cried the chief. "Will they yield?"

"Oh, yer jist go back ter yer daubed fools, and quit yer gab!" cried the guide.

The savage understood English slightly, and after some reflection, deciphered the command. He started back a pace or so, somewhat taken aback by finding he was taunting Americans. Then he resumed, swaggering:

"Come out from your hiding-place, women! Come like men into the plain and talk to Red-Knife. He is a brave—he has taken many scalps; the whites are dogs and are cowards."

"I'll put a stopper to his mouth!" declared Jack, bending and creeping through the wagons. Then, standing in full view before the chief, he cried, brandishing his rifle:

"Get back to your howling crew, you Comanche renegade dog! Get back, or I'll send you in a hurry."

He spoke in the chief's own tongue, and he recognized Jack. Knowing his deadly precision with the rifle, well acquainted with his reckless daring and warlike proclivities, he prepared to retreat to his companions. But he could not resist the temptation of another taunt.

"Squaw from the bitter river" (Cimarron Fork), "dog from a dog's country, coyote with a forked tongue—Red-Knife will dance with his warriors and his braves around your fire-stake. The squaws shall spit upon him, the papposes will pierce his flesh with darts, and the coyotes will tear his flesh."

He turned and fled, dodging and darting from side to side to avoid Jack's bullet, which he knew would speed after him. It did.

Enraged, Cimarron Jack leveled his rifle and glanced over the sights. The gun belched its smoke and fire, the chief dodged at the very moment, and the bullet razed the black feather which nodded on his painted head, and sped harmlessly on.

The guide, Sam, and Burt also fired, but their bullets were wild—the chief's erratic and rapid motion rendered it almost impossible to strike him. Running like a deer, he speedily regained his mustang and his band, and mounting, spoke several hasty words to his clustered braves, gesticulating wildly.

The next moment they separated—one band of seven starting away toward the north, while the other, with the chief,

rode west a few yards, and drawing as near as they dared, halted, facing the whites.

"Now it has come right down to business, and we'll have to look slarp," growled Jack.

"Why so—what is wrong?" simply inquired Louis Robidoux.

Jack glanced scornfully over him from head to foot.

"Have you any eyes in your head?" he asked, with curling lip. "If you have, just use 'em. Can't you see they are going to make a surround?"

Under his yellow hair, the Canadian's face flushed, and he scowled at Jack.

"Use me more respectfully, or you may rue it," he growled.

"Dry up! You had better be a trifle more respectful yourself, or *you* will rue it. I am Cimarron Jack, the fellow who teaches grizzlies how to wrestle, collar-and-elbow; I am the fellow who can hold a kicking mule by the off hind foot with my thumb and little finger. I tell *you*, the man in the moon doesn't dare to make faces at me of a still night. He knows I can shoot mighty straight, *he* does."

"Quit yer braggin' and mind yer eye," admonished the guide, surlily. "It's no time ter brag, now."

"Yes, Cimarron Jack; pray do not breed discord at this critical moment," said Mr. Wheeler. "See, the hill now hides the savages from our view—the band that rode away."

"Who's breeding discord, I'd like to know? I don't let any mule-whacker say boo, to me, I tell *you*. However, young bantam," turning to the driver, "you and I see more of each other, mind that. For the present, there is too much to look after to fool with you."

CHAPTER VIII

GIVE AND TAKE.

CIMARRON JACK, with these words, turned his back to the sulky Canadian, and carefully reconnoitered the position of the Indians. The chief's band still remained drawn up in line, facing them like soldiers on a dress-parade; the other was not in sight.

"This won't do," remarked Jack. "We must keep an eye on those devils who rode round back of us. First thing we know the whole gang will come whooping on us. That'll never do—we must keep them off."

"But how are we going to do that?" inquired the Canadian.

Jack became nettled.

"Why, peep over the top of the hill, to be sure."

"But they will shoot us—Red Knife's band."

"Oh, they will try? I know I'm the crack shot of these plains, and I can't hit a man three quarters of a mile off with a carbine that won't kill at three hundred yards. They darsn't come within half a mile to shoot, so we are safe from that quarter. There's no time to be lost; those red fools may be crawling up the other side of the hill for all we know."

So saying, he coolly left the wagons, and deliberately walked up the hillside. He was greeted with a volley from Red-Knife's band, but the bullets fell far short; the short Mexican carbines were useless at long range.

He slackened his pace as he drew near the summit, and dropping on all-fours, crept up to the top, and peered quickly but cautiously over. Then, with a short oath, he rose to his feet, and with a surprised look gazed over the plain.

"What is it, Jack?" demanded the guide.

"Tear my ten-ton heart out if there's an Apache in sight on this side."

"That so?"

"It's a fact. Come up here and see, if you don't believe it."

The guide grasped his rifle and started toward the summit. The rest followed.

"Stay back, every one!" commanded Jack. "Two's enough up here. You stay back and keep the renegade at a distance."

They obeyed, and Simpson mounted the hill and stood beside Jack.

"Tho't yer said yer kedn't see nuthin'?" remarked the former.

"So I did, and you can't either."

"Kin, too."

"Where?"

"Yonder. See that black speck movin' 'long toward the east, a hundred yards ter the right?"

"Yes."

"That's an Apashe's top-knot, an' he's skulkin' along an arroyo."

"Simpson, you always did have sharp eyes."

The guide received the compliment quietly, and resumed:

"Arroyo bends ter the right jest thar, an' every one o' them red devils is a-crawlin' round ter sneak in ter us. Call the men hyar an' giv' 'em a volley when they come in sight. We kin pick off the lot."

The men were called just in time. Just as the savages rounded the bend and arrived in full view each man chose a savage and all fired simultaneously. They were all good shots, and the effect was marked.

Five of the seven Apaches threw up their arms and with loud cries reeled and fell dead. The other two went back into the arroyo like rabbits.

"Well done!" cried Jack. "Hallo! look out—there comes Red-Knife. Pull your revolvers and don't shoot too quick. Get un'er cover lively now."

They rushed down the hill again, and crept behind the wagons. Red-Knife had seen the fatal volley and defeat of his men and was freuzied with rage. At the head of the

whooping, screeching pack he rode, intent upon a sudden charge while they were exposed.

"Load your guns, men!" cried Jack. "Don't be in a hurry—there's plenty of time. Hurrah! we are the cocks of the walk, the men that can't be beat."

The two parties were equally matched now, the savages only numbering one more than the whites. But this did not deter Red-Knife from making a charge. He had lived long with the whites and had partially avoided his savage style of warfare for that of the white men.

On the yelling pack dashed, screaming hideously and rending the air with their shrill whoops. The men behind the wagons lay quiet, and having all reloaded, sighted across their long rifles, coolly. Now that they were staring dread danger in the face, the cook, Kit Duncan, was cool and determined, having thrown aside the nervous apprehension with which he had been afflicted at the approach of the savages. He had killed his man, too, in the arroyo, and Jack regained confidence in him.

Suddenly the approaching pack divided, part going to the right, and part to the left, swerving by, beyond sure rifle aim. Never apparently noticing their enemies, they rode on at a keen run until they had half completed the circuit of the camp.

"By thunder!" shouted Simpson. "Climb inter the wagons, boys—they air goin' ter fire criss-cross."

"A cross-fire!" ejaculated Jack. "Pile into the wagons, boys—lively now."

He was already half-way into the nearest wagon. The men stopped not to reflect—they knew that under a cross-fire they would soon be cut to pieces, and helter-skelter they scrambled, each into the nearest wagon.

As it happened, the guide and Sam were in the same wagon with Cimarron Jack. In the next, and center one, were the remainder, huddled in the bottom, to escape the bullets which would easily pierce the canvas cap-tents.

"Blast it! the horses will git shot—every blamed one of 'em," declared Simpson, in disgust. "They've got a fair, square aim at 'em—rot their red hides. Cuss an Injun, anyhow. Thar's no knowin' what they'll do, nor when they'll do it."

A rejoinder was made in the shape of a bullet which "sung" through the wagon-cover just above his head; he dodged, and growled, "Lucky we ain't outside now."

"It is, indeed," rejoined Sam; "very fortunate. We should have thought of this contingency."

It was a singular oversight. In the manner in which the wagons were placed, a sort of lane was formed by them and the supporting knoll. The savages, at opposite sides, could bring to bear a heavy cross fire through the lane; they were doing it now, hence the whites' alarm.

For a few moments a perfect hailstorm of bullets rattled against the wagons, but no one was struck; then they ceased to bury themselves in the woodwork.

"They've emptied their barrels," Jack said, with a contemptuous smile. "The more fools they—now just stick your heads out, boys, and pepper 'em while they can't return it!" he added, in a loud voice.

"Le's both go fur Red-Knife," whispered the guide.

"Ay: we can't both miss him."

Hastily throwing up the wagon-cover, they took a quick aim and fired. However, the wily savage saw the movement, and slipping behind his mustang, eluded the bullets, which, close together, whistled through the air where his body had been but a moment before. A shrill yell of derision came from his lips as he peered over the steed's back at the foiled scouts. Jack swore roundly.

Sam had also fired at a tall savage, but had been foiled in the same manner. The ones in the other wagon, however, had succeeded in bringing one dusky devil to the dust. Now they were exactly equal.

They durst not peep from the wagons lest they might prove a good mark for an Apache rifle. However, Simpson soon bethought himself of a simple plan by which they might easily reduce their enemies' number. Drawing his knife he cut a slit in the canvas wagon-cover, then two more for his companions; then called out to the occupants of the other wagon to do the same. Now they could protrude their rifles, and with a good aim and a simultaneous volley might lessen their enemies by one-half.

The plan would have been successful had not the chief

suddenly suspected something. Making a signal, he began to move away. However, he was a little too dilatory. Just as he was getting into long rifle-range, the guide and his companions discharged their pieces, the others doing the same at the other band.

One bullet whistled by the renegade's head and lodged in that of a short, malicious warrior who rolled from his horse, dead. Another struck Red Knife in the leg, they could tell, as he twitched it suddenly, then clapped his hand upon it. A yell from the other band caused them to look toward it. A gaunt, tall savage started up in his saddle, gazed wildly round for a moment, then his mustang galloped away, riderless; two savages the less.

It was now high noon, and the sun's rays poured down like molten lead on the white covers of the wagons. Outside, the horses, who were unharmed, (the Indians having thought to secure them alive) protruded their tongues and nickered low and pleadingly for a taste of the water-butt. The men, too, mager the warm and tepid water, were suffering with the intense heat. The very air seemed as if a hurricane from a baker's oven was brewing. The wood-work was blistered and parched; and still the sun shone redly, still the men sweltered and watched, still the savages, drawn up in line, watched the wagons under the knoll.

The day wore on. Vultures wheeled above, now drawn hither by the sounds of strife; coyotes skulked and sniffed the air at a safe distance; and still the sun shone down hotly upon the two hostile bands.

Suddenly the savages rode back to their former position, and clustering together, gesticulated energetically. The whites could not hear, but knew they were engaged in a discussion.

Only a few moments they talked and gestured, then they turned their mustangs' heads to the south-west.

Dismounting from his mustang, Red-Knife stalked toward the whites for a few rods; then he cried:

"The Red-Knife is a brave—he seeks not to war with dogs and cowards. The sounds of war come from the south; there will the Comanche go to war with braves—he leaves pale-face dogs to their own cowardly deeds. The Red-Knife has spoken."

Cimarron Jack sprung out of the wagon into the open plain. The chief recognized him.

"Dog from the bitter river!" he cried, with an insulting gesture; "coward of a coyote, squaw, sneak, the Red-Knife laughs at you."

"I'm Cimarron Jack, the grizzly-tamer! I'm the man that killed cock-robin! I'm the jumping wild-cat from Bitter Creek! I'm the man that can run faster 'n a jack rabbit, swear more than a camp-cook, neigh more than an elephant, and kill thieving Indians like the small-pox. I'm the Grand Mogul of Tartary, and I'm the cock of the walk."

The chief turned, stalked back to his steed, mounted, and rode away with his band toward the south; clustered together, riding swiftly.

The men came out from the wagons, and, standing on the plain, watched the Indians as they swiftly receded, wondering.

It was no sham, no strategy; they were actually going; and, in the course of an hour, were lost in the distance.

"I say, Simpson, what does all this mean?" inquired Mr. Wheeler.

"Dunno!"

"Haven't you any idea?" asked Sam.

"No."

"I have—a pretty sure one," replied Jack.

"What is it?"

"You know Apache Jack told me the other day, at Comanche Creek, that thirty Apaches chased him thirty miles or more?"

"Yes."

"Well, he said Red-Knife was the chief of the band. Now the skunk had only fourteen here besides himself—fifteen in all. That shows there has been a division for some reason or other. Now he's bound south to fetch the bulk of the band to help him. He will be back in twenty hours, depend upon it—then look out."

"I think you are wrong," said Burt Scranton. "If Red-knife was goin' ter fetch the rest of his gang, he'd leave some one hyar ter keep an eye on us."

"Jest whar *you're* wrong," declared Simpson. "We leave

a big trail behind us—I tell *you*. It'll be mighty easy fur him ter foller it. He takes his hull gang ter make us b'lieve he's gone fur good—the old badger. But I b'lieve we kin outwit him yet."

"How?" was the general question.

"Jest this 'ere way: 'bout ten miles north is a bigger hill nor this—a hill kivered with loose rocks. Thar's a devilish peart place ter make a stand thar—and it's only three miles from the sweetest water yer ever tasted—Alkali Creek. It's what them fellers that think they know so much when they don't know nuthin'—book-writers—call a subter-rain again stream."

"Subterranean," corrected Sam. "Alkali Creek does not, by its name, give any great promise."

"Wal, thar's good water thar; it ain't very cold, but it's sweet, an' that's the main thing."

"I believe we would make a strike by going," added Cimarron Jack. "I know the hill—it is a strange place. Men have been seen to ride up to it, and suddenly disappear, and all efforts to find them have been useless. However, for a year there's been nothing wrong about it, and I, for one, move we go as quick as we can. The sun is only three or four hours high, and time is scarce. Besides we may find the young Miss there."

Mr. Wheeler groaned, and Carpenter looked gloomy, but they both agreed with Jack. Of course, the rest were bound to follow them.

The hasty resolve was soon put in execution. The horses were watered from the butt, and attached to the wagons; the drivers mounted their saddles, and the horsemen trotted away, past the ghastly red bodies, past the coyotes, under the wheeling vultures, bound for the Hillock.

CHAPTER IX.

GONE—GONE!

ON that same afternoon, and about sunset or a little later Pedro was eating a frugal supper in the hollow hillock with Kissie.

Both were downcast. She, on account of her friends, was uneasy and sad, while he was still experiencing the fear of dealing with something not of this world. The mysterious voice he knew so well of old, that terrible form he had seen, still haunted him. And more; the sudden disappearance of the apparition highly alarmed him and kept his nerves strung to the highest tension, and he expected every moment to see it stalk in upon him.

But he kept his own counsel and did not further alarm and annoy his companion by relating the incident.

The supper was plain—the remnants of a venison dinner and some dried meat which Pedro carried in his haversack. The torch threw a feeble, flickering light over the gloomy apartment; an insect droned a funeral dirge close by in some cranny; the horse close by stamped and chewed his grain, and the sound of the mustang's hoofs outside were dull and heavy; night was drawing on.

"Hist, senorita!" Pedro suddenly whispered, with uplifted hand. "Surely I heard a voice."

They listened; all was quiet.

They were about resuming their meal when the mustang outside snorted and galloped away; something had alarmed her.

"Something is at hand," said Pedro. "Stay here, senorita, while I peep out. Do not be alarmed—I will not leave you."

"Oh, I pray it is my father—pray God it is," she replied, with a lightened heart.

"Perhaps it is—I hope so, senorita. But I must go—I am sure I hear the voice again."

Though inwardly quaking, Pedro's exterior was cool, impassible—his features betrayed no fear. Though never

doubting that if he looked out he should again see the fearful apparition, he picked up his gun and squeezing through the interior passage, stalked to the door and peeped out.

"Hello ! thar's her mustang," he heard a strange voice say, and a moment later several men rode round the hill. He was relieved at finding they were flesh and blood, and not his ghastly enemy, and using his eyes sharply, scanned them.

They were three in number. One, a middle-aged man with a careworn expression and haggard face was drearily peering round about him. Close beside him, on a "clay-bank" horse, sat a handsome young man, speaking to him in a low tone, evidently endeavoring to cheer him. The third was a burly, stout man, on a powerful "States horse." The reader is well aware who they are—the party of searchers.

But Pedro did not know them, and though strongly suspecting their identity, was not the man to trust to appearances or jump at conclusions. He resolved to wait and watch.

"Here comes the guide and Cimarron Jack," remarked Carpenter, pointing over the plain. "And the wagons are at hand, too ; we will soon be strongly encamped."

Mr. Wheeler made no rejoinder save a sigh.

By the gaze of his two comrades, Pedro judged the guide and Cimarron Jack were at hand. The latter he had often heard of, but had never seen. His supposition proved correct ; a rattle of wheels was heard, three white-capped wagons rounded the hill and drew up by the three horsemen, and simultaneously two men came round the opposite side, mounted, the one on a mustang and the other on a powerful deep-bay.

Though the twilight had almost given place to night, yet Pedro recognized the former of the two horsemen—the guide. His heart leaped at the sight, for joy. Many were the dangers he had faced with the weatherbeaten guide, many were the hardships they together had endured, closely-knit were the bonds of mutual like and esteem ; and Pedro with joy gazed upon his companion of yore.

His first impulse was to rush out and grasp his old "partner" by the hand ; but a second thought changed his mind.

"They might become alarmed and shoot me," he reflected. "I will make myself known."

"But stay," he resumed. "I might as well see to my treasure—I don't know all of those men; there might be a knave among them."

The precious bag still lay covered with the saddle, the water-bucket and the blankets.

He had dug the gold from a hole close by. It was not re-filled, and taking the bag he placed it in its former hiding-place and then threw the concealing articles over it; for the present they were safe.

Then going to the closed trap-door he placed his lips to a chink, and whispered: "Tim Simpson."

Intending to give Kissie a glad surprise, he lowered his voice so she could not hear him from the other chamber.

"What's wanted?" growled the guide, supposing one of his party was the speaker. He received no rejoinder. Pedro whispered again.

"Simpson—old friend."

"Well, spit it out!" sharply spoke the guide. "Don't whisper, 'Simpson,' all day."

"Who spoke?" asked Burt.

"Dunno."

"I heard a whisper," said Jack.

"So did I; and I," added several.

"Didn't any o' yer fellers speak ter me?"

"No—no."

"Durned cur'ous. I heerd a whisper, sartin."

"So did all of us," said Sam.

Pedro spoke a trifle louder.

"Simpson, here I am—Pedro Felipe," and he boldly emerged from the hill.

Astounded, the party started back, then leveled their guns, believing him immortal, his appearance was so sudden and unexpected. Pedro, seeing his danger, dropped prone to the earth. He was not too soon, for, staggered and alarmed, several fired at him; but his presence of mind saved his life.

Rushing rapidly to Simpson, he sprung behind his mustang to avoid being shot, as several guns were aimed at him.

"Simpson—have you forgotten me? I am your old friend, Pedro."

The guide recognized him and sprung from his mustang. He was too old a hunter and guide to remain surprised for any length of time.

"Gee-whiz!" he cried, scrambling about in a mad wrestle with the Mexican. "Durn yer old greaser soul! gee-mini, cry-mini! Hooray! dog-gon me ef it ain't Pedro!"

The rifles were lowered and the horsemen stared aghast. Surprised, astounded, they sat wondering, neither stirring or speaking. Meanwhile the American and Mexican scrambled about in their wild and friendly wrestle, overwhelming each other with their joyful buffets, and light hugs. To a stranger it would have seemed a struggle of death as the guide cursed roundly and bestowed epithets without number upon his long-absent friend, many too coarse, even foul, to be presented here.

At last, from sheer inability to further continue, they relaxed their clutches, and drawing back a pace, stood looking the other over from head to foot—they were rare friends.

"Cimarron Jack," said the guide, "here's the sharpest, 'cutest, patientest man in the kentry. Durn yer braggin' eyes, git off of yer boss and greet him."

"Pedro Felipe!" cried Jack, dismounting, "you are a greaser, but a first-class fellow I've heard. Shake the vice of the cock of the walk and the terror of the grizzlies. Put your hand there, you villain."

"Cimarron Jack, I, too, have heard of you frequently, as a boasting, vaunting knave, with more tongue than strength or brains. I hope you will die with your boots on," replied Pedro, shaking his hand cordially. That introduction would be considered formal and cold a few miles north west—in California, where every man greets a stranger with an oath and an evident insult. However, these two men were polite and gentlemanly, and either would have regarded as an insult any more polite greeting.

"Where did you come from, Pedro?" asked Jack. "Dain me, I was scared—I was for a fact."

"Out of the hill yonder."

"Glory hallelujurum! there is a hole. What in the name of Cimarron Jack the thoroughbred from Ritter Creek, were you doing in there?"

Pedro pointed to the mustang, Dimple, grazing at a distance. "Do you see that mustang?" he asked.

Mr. Wheeler sprung from his horse, followed by Sam and Burt. Rushing to Pedro he cried, seizing him by the shoulder :

"For God's sake, where is my daughter? Tell me, sir, quickly!"

Pedro was a man of few words. In answer, he pointed quietly to the dark aperture in the hillside.

"Where? I do not see her. Sir, you joke with me."

"No he don't, nuther," surlily put in the guide. "He ain't thet kind of a man, let me tell yer."

"Perhaps he means there is a cave in the hill," suggested Carpenter.

"Just so, senor; she is there."

They stopped not to parley, or to demand an explanation of his sudden appearance, albeit they were greatly surprised; but one and all dismounting, rushed to the cave entrance.

But Pedro, suddenly alarmed for his treasure's safety, sprung before the hole. Drawing his beautiful dagger, he cried, hoarsely :

"Stand back! back! you shall not enter."

"But we will!" shouted Carpenter, rushing at him menacingly. The guide put out his foot and dexterously tripped him.

"And, by Judas, yer won't go in ef he sez not ter!" he growled, placing himself beside Pedro, and cocking his rifle. "Pedro's my friend, and I'll stan' by him ef I hev ter desert the gang ter do it. Jest count me in, Pedro."

"Let me go in—stand away!" cried Mr. Wheeler, wildly. "I *must* go in."

The guide put him back with his hands. "Mr. Wheeler, fur the present yer 'r my boss, and a durned good one yer've be'n, too; but, Pedro an' me swore ter allus stick to one another, and I'll stick ter him, and fight the party I'm a member of—that's Simpson, the guide."

"Oh, thunder, Simpson! what's the use of keeping a man in suspense? I'm disgusted with you, for a fact."

"Cimarron Jack, you an' me hev run tergether considerable, but I'll stick ter Pedro, yer may jest bet yer bottom dollar

on it! He sez her shain't go in, and I'll back every durned thing he says. "Ef yer don't like it yer can lump it!"

Cimarron Jack grew red in the face, and his eyes sparkled. Pedro, knowing a quarrel between these two men would result in the death of one or both of them, hastily said:

"Don't quarrel—keep cool! I'm willing every one should go in—I am even anxious; but I must go in first. That is the reason I kept you back."

"Wal, why 'n thunder don't ye go in, then!" demanded Burt. "Thar's no use in talkin' all day, is thar? the old gentleman wants ter see his darter—kain't yer let him in?"

Pedro sheathed his dagger, and saying:

"Certainly—come in," sprung over the small pit in which his treasure was hidden. Then, knowing such a procedure would attract attention, he stepped aside. The men filed quickly in, leaving their horses outside unwatched, and stood blinking in the double twilight inside.

"Christina—Kissie!" cried Mr. Wheeler. "My child, where are you?"

There was silence for a moment. Pedro expected to see Kissie glide gladly from the inner chamber into her father's arms; but she did not appear.

"Strange," he thought. "Is it possible she is sleeping?"

"Well—where is she?" impatiently demanded Carpenter.

"She is in the inner apartment; I was thinking she would come at the sound of her father's voice."

"Where is the inner apartment? lead us there!" clamored the men. Pedro, leaving his treasure, reluctantly stalked toward the narrow passage. They followed eagerly, pressing close upon him. He slipped through and found the torch was extinguished.

"Ha!" he ejaculated.

"What's up?" whispered Simpson, in his ear. "Curse this black hole—it's dark as a pocket!"

"Where is she? now you have brought us here, where is she? Strike a light! a light! Kissie—Kissie" cried Mr. Wheeler. They listened. No answering voice sounded, no sound was heard; deathlike stillness, and damp, thick air brooded round.

"Sirs, there is something very strange in this," hollowly

whispered Pedro. "I left her here not fifteen minutes since. The torch is where I left it—my hand is upon it; I will strike a light."

The torch flamed redly out as Pedro, waving it aloft, peered round the chamber.

He could not see her. With the men strangely affected by some unknown influence, with their weapons drawn, he walked slowly about the narrow chamber, making the entire circuit without success.

"Senors," and his voice, they could perceive, was hollow and quivering—"there have been ugly and strange happenings here, to-day. She is not here."

All was silence.

"There is still the first chamber—she may be there; we may have missed her; sirs, this way."

They followed.

In the first chamber again. The torch flickers in the breeze as they walk slowly about after it—a mysterious influence is upon all.

"Sirs—senors—she is not here."

All is quiet and the torch flares redly. The horses outside are silent—they never stamp, the night breeze is damp, and the torch flickers and flares; all is quiet in the Land of Silence.

A hollow voice is heard; it is Pedro's; he speaks almost in a whisper.

"Senors—sirs—let us go outside."

He stalks away. They follow in utter silence; even the guide and the ranger are under a strange influence. They emerge into the open air.

Pedro, the guide and Cimarron Jack stood on the summit of the hill and peered round in the darkness. The twilight had given place to night, yet they could see some distance, the atmosphere was so clear. The horses stood as if statues, motionless; the mustang was out on the plain, but she was no longer browsing; on the contrary, she at intervals tossed her head and stamped—she was uneasy.

The guide and the ranger went slowly down the hill, with subdued faces, into the throng below. Pedro remained above with his torch.

The mustang now trotted toward him, snorting and toss-

ing her mane; he watched her, flaring the torch for a better view.

Suddenly she screamed shrilly and galloped rapidly away. At the same instant Pedro saw a form approaching. He waved the torch.

The form drew near, and he perceived it was that of a colossal horseman. He slightly stooped and held his torch aloft. He drew nearer, and strangely his horse's feet gave out no sound. The men below were on the opposite side of the hill.

Suddenly the horseman loomed up as if by magic, and Pedro, with a wild cry, started to his feet. The horseman wheeled and was riding away at a gallop into the darkness—in thirty seconds he was invisible. Pedro for a moment stood stupefied, and no wonder, for in that colossal form, on the powerful black horse, under the conical hat with a black plume, rode *the Trailer*.

For a moment only he stood semi-paralyzed, then, with a wild cry, and waving his torch, he sprung down the hill. Into the aperture he went, and with trembling, eager hands tore away the coverings of his treasure.

Off came the saddle, then the water-bucket, aside went the blankets, and his arm plunged into the hole.

Standing in the entrance, they saw him rise, reel, stagger, and fall directly under his horse's hoofs with a wild cry, and a brief, hoarsely yelled sentence. Then Pedro fainted, with the echo of his cry ringing and dying through the gloomy cavern:

"Gone—gone—all gone!"

They rushed in and lifted him up, the guide first. Taking him tenderly in his arms, he held the torch to his face; then he laid him gently down; then he shook his head slowly; then, with every muscle, feature and lineament of his face showing his earnestness, with wild eyes, with voice trembling and hollow in spite of himself, he said:

"Gentlemen, thar's suthin' wrong 'bout this cursed, ugly black bill; the strongest, coolest, bravest man in the world has fainted clean away—dead away!"

"And the girl—where is she?—she is gone," muttered Cimarron Jack.

"She is gone—gone!"

CHAPTER X.

WORSE YET.

THE guide, lifting the torch, looked round on a small band of vaguely-frightened, nervous men. Why should they be frightened—why nervous? Nearly all were accustomed to hob-nob with Nature in her strangest and most incomprehensible moods—were accustomed to sudden surprises and alarms, and all were endowed with at least ordinary courage and “nerve.”

The secret of this alarm was this—they all had heard that a once feared and malignant robber, who had been dead a year, was roaming nocturnally about the Land of Silence. Knowing him to be dead, they were satisfied it was his ghost. All men have at least a small amount of superstition innate—these were no exception. The guide had recounted his strange meeting with the robber, and had been implicitly believed, as his manner when relating it was not that of one who would joke or falsely speak. Having never seen him they were affected by the guide’s mistrust and vague fear, and by the sudden, strange, and real disappearance of Kissie. They never doubted she had been an occupant of the cave—was not her mustang just without? Then if she had not, Pedro never would have voluntarily shown himself if he had wished to keep her concealed. It was only too plain she had been there and had disappeared.

They would have been more alarmed had they seen what Pedro had seen—had they known what he knew; it was better they did not—far better.

Darkness reigned over the Land of Silence; the hill with its adjacent horses and wagons—with its inner, half-scared occupants, lay still as the cool breeze swept over it; only the mustang on the prairie quietly browsing made a faint noise as she cropped the short and wiry bunch-grass here and there—all was quiet in the vast desert, as the night waxed on toward midnight.

Nine o'clock. Now Pedro was sitting up, supported by the faithful guide, and plied and harassed with questions he chose not to answer. He told of Kissie's appearance at the cave, of his conversation with her, of the way in which she had occupied herself during the time she had been with him, of the last he saw of her, where she was and what she was doing; but why he came, when he arrived, what he tarried for, and what he had seen, he refused to tell. He was firm and decided, though his nerves were shaken considerably.

Mr. Wheeler was overwhelmed and in a semi-stupor, and Carpenter was alarmed for his health. After being so near his loved daughter, after almost touching her and being within ear-shot, the shock of the sudden disappearance had unmanned him, and he had sunk into a state of imbecility.

Carpenter, loving Kissie and grieving for her, was more in a state to appreciate his sufferings than any one else, and did his best to comfort him, being assisted in a rude manner by the faithful Burt Scranton. But if he heard their words of comfort he did not reply—sitting motionless he grieved alone. The night wore on.

Ten o'clock. The group was gloomy and quiet, each one sitting or lying on the ground, some smoking, others chewing, and all reserved and moody. No watch outside had been set, as they were all strangely stupefied by the recent strange events. The horses attached to the wagons were quiet, the deserted saddle-horses were lying down, and the mustang out on the plain began to show very distinctly—the moon was rising.

Between eleven and twelve o'clock there was a slight movement outside among the horses, and a succession of stampings ensued; but it was soon quieted, involuntarily, and was still again.

Cimarron Jack, growing weary of the dead calm in the cell-like chamber, rose to his feet and started toward the door. As he did so, a clamor arose outside. A mare screamed viciously, stamping; a shrill "nicker" came from a horse, and there was at the same moment a sound of rushing and galloping hoofs.

He sprung to the trap and peered out, then yelled shortly.

Swarming round among the stationary train were over a score of running, twisting, gliding Indians, overrunning the wagon, busily engaged in unhitching the draft-horses, while more were galloping over the plain striving to lariat the saddle horses, which had taken fright and galloped away. They were busy as bees, and were swarming round like them. Thirty running, robbing Indians make a larger show than fifty whites, they are so much more agile and quick.

Selecting a burly knave close by, who was trying to burst a stout tobacco caddy, he took a long, deliberate aim and fired, then drawing his Colt's six-shooter, commenced firing rapidly, yelling like a demon.

The large Indian fell dead on his breast, with a gurgling groan; and the precise and correctly aimed revolver wounded two more, who dropped, then rose and staggered away.

Like magic, the work of plunder ceased. Individually dropping their occupations, the savages sharply looked round for the cause of the sudden and fatal volley, but as Jack had slunk back into the cave they saw nothing. Then they became wildly alarmed, all their hereditary superstitions crowding one upon another, and began to retreat.

Cimarron Jack strove to organize his men, in order to make a sudden onslaught, which would be more efficacious than a volley from the hill, as the savages would be frightened out of their wits at seeing them rise from the ground. But surprised, the "green" ones clustered together like sheep, paying no attention to his oaths and orders, and before he could begin to reassure them, the savages had mounted their mustangs, and with the stolen draft-horses, went away like the wind, a large and scared band of thirty, headed by the malevolent chief, Red-Knife.

"Give 'em a volley before they get away!" he cried, leveling his reloaded rifle and firing. The guide, Sam and Burt followed his example, but only one shot took effect—a retreating savage rolled from his mustang, which sprung away riderless. The others were too surprised to fire.

Jack started out into the plain.

"Jerusalem! look at 'em skedaddling off with every cussed draft-horse. Whew! mount as quick as you can, boys, and after 'em. Lively, now!"

The moonlight revealed an exciting scene. Away toward the south-east, riding like the wind, were seven and twenty Apaches, fleeing from some unknown terror, with a dozen draft-horses led after them. Two reeled in their saddles, one growing faint and scarcely able to cling to his mustang; the other, though weak from loss of blood, still managed to preserve his balance, though clumsily; they were the victims of Cimarron Jack's proficiency with fire-arms. One mustang was riderless—the one from which the last savage had been shot; and he galloped along with his mounted companions, his side streaked with blood.

Behind were several men out on the plain by the hillock, coaxing their runaway steeds to them. It was a tedious, long task, as they had been frightened in good earnest.

Finally, Simpson succeeded in lariatting his mustang, and then mounting, soon collected the rest. Then the majority of the horsemen rode away in pursuit, leaving the rest to search in the cave for the lost girl.

The pursuers were Jack, Simpson, Carpenter, Burt and Louis Robidoux; the remainder were Mr. Wheeler, Duncan, Napoleon Robidoux and the half-stupefied and almost useless Pedro.

The latter party watched the others till they were lost in the far distance. Then they turned toward the cave.

"We are in for it," remarked Robidoux, in a low tone, to Duncan. "What if more of these mean Indians should come? We'd be the only ones fit to fight 'em. Look at the master and the Mexican—they are both entirely useless. One is half-dead about some strange affair, while the other is almost in a trance with grief."

Duncan broke out vehemently:

"They went away and never told me whether they'd be back to breakfast. Now, blast the luck! if I cook up a lot of grub for the whole party, and they ain't here to eat it, the things'll all spile, and then I'll catch thunder for being extravagant and wasteful. And if I don't cook for the lot, they'll be sure to come back, and then there'll be a fuss 'cause breakfast ain't ready."

"Oh, never mind the breakfast; there are other things more important than that, just now."

The cook stared at him aghast.

"Other things more im-port-ant to look after! Oh, every hair of my head! Oh, my boot-heels! Oh, if I didn't get breakfast to-morrow, what a swearing, red-hot mess there'd be—every man a-cussing me. You never was a camp cook—you don't know what it is."

"It's the softest job in the train."

"Say that again and I'll knock you down! Great Cæsar! if I wanted to have the sweetest revenge on an enemy, I'd condemn him to cook all his life for a camp. He'd go crazy—every hair in his head would turn gray in a few months. Heavens! what torments! Talk about your referees—talk about your President of the United States—your umpires—your settlers of disputes—there's not so thankless a job in the world as that of a camp cook. It is always, cook, do this—cook, do that; cook, when's dinner going to be ready? There ain't enough biscuits, cook—why didn't ye make more? You never make the coffee strong enough, cook—why don't ye make it stronger? Cook, go fetch some drinking water! just as if I war a slave. No wonder I'm cross; who ever saw a camp cook that wasn't? Nobody.

"And then if a meal ain't ready to a second, how I'm sworn at and cursed. Cook, what makes you always behind? you are never on time. Then when it is ready, then comes the music—a regular dirge to me. One grumbling rascal says the meat ain't cooked; another swears 'cause thar's gnats in the coffee—just as if I could go round catching bugs like a boy with a butterfly net. And if a feller is in a civilized country and has butter, then it melts until you have to soak your bread in it to get any one. They cuss me for that too, and say I'm lazy and stingy because I won't tote an ice-chest round. These fellers are the worst I ever did see. Bimeby they'll be wanting ice cream, jelly, chocolate, oranges, mattresses to sleep on, and a waiter for every one. They'll be wanting linen shirts, kid gloves, and a boot black bimeby—I wouldn't be at all surprised if they should beg for ottomans, easy-chairs and musketo-bars—not a bit. Oh, curse the day I was fool enough to join as camp cook! Oh, every hair of my head!"

The Canadian, seeing he was in a fever, no further aggra-

vated him by continuing the conversation, but glancing over the plain, said :

"There are three horses yet—no, two, that are loose. Can you throw a lariat, cook?"

"No, I can't—and what's more, I ain't a-going to. I'm up every morning before daylight, cooking while you lazy fellows are snoring; then I drive team and wash dishes at the same time—I ain't cross-eyed, and the result is I go slap into some hole, then get cussed. Then at noon you fellers roll on your lazy backs and see me cook, cook; and each one is always wanting me to cook a dish just the way some one else don't want it done. Then it's wash dishes and drive team again all the afternoon; a cross-eyed man could do it well enough, but *I* can't. Then I'm washing dishes long after every one's asleep at night, and am expected to turn out every morning a little after midnight and go to work, work again. No, sir; if you want the horses brought up, you can do it yourself, for I can't and won't."

"All right, Duncan. You do have a hard time, that is a fact. Go in now, and get some sleep and I'll try my hand at catching the horses."

Duncan went inside and found Pedro and Mr. Wheeler both in a semi-stupor, from different causes, while Robidoux took a lariat and started away toward the black horse and the mustang, Dimple.

They were some two hundred yards distant, and both grazing, though differently. The moon shone brightly, and by its light he could see the black horse was quietly feeding, while the mustang was restless and kept moving away from him as if afraid of his superior size.

Silence reigned over the level plain as the Canadian walked rapidly toward them with his lariat in his hand. He looked carefully over the plain—nothing was in sight; he was alone on the plain in the Land of Silence.

He halted, as a thought struck him, hesitated a moment, then went on.

"What if I should see the ghost the guide was talking about?" he mused. "I begin to believe he did see one after the strange things that have happened to-night. That Pedro fellow they say is a brave man, but he's scared to-night."

I wonder if he saw it? I'd hate to have him ride up to me now."

Once more he looked around on the moonlit silent plain—once more he moved on.

The black horse ceased his browsing as he drew near, and looked at him fixedly; something at that moment occurred to Robidoux.

"Pedro's horse is in the cave," he whispered to himself; "and all the others are gone except Dimple. It is strange—whose horse can it be?"

He went on and drew near. The mustang had moved away quite a distance, and stood snorting and tossing her mane; she was evidently affrighted—what was the matter?

She was gazing at something behind him—he turned. As he did so he uttered a sharp cry.

A form was coming toward him from the hillock—a colossal form walking rapidly. A tall hat surmounted his head, and in the band was a waving plume; a *serape* was over his shoulders, almost concealing his body; he was quite near, being in fact only a rod or so distant.

The Canadian knew it was not Pedro, and no man as enormous was of the party besides him except Cimarron Jack, and he was away. He trembled; could it be the guide's ghost?

The man was almost upon him, and was advancing rapidly. Seized with sudden terror, nameless but vivid, he clasped his hands and awaited his approach. His old superstitions were fully aroused, and he felt it was a thing to be dreaded.

In five seconds he stood face to face with the whitest, ghastliest face, the blackest, keenest eye, and the most terrifying form he had ever seen. He knew now who it was, from the guide's description.

Horror! he was facing, on this moonlight night, on this bare, lonely plain, *the ghost of the Trailer!*

"You are late on the plain to-night."

They were almost the very words he had spoken to the guide. With a wild cry, and moved by his great terror, he saw the figure stalk toward the black horse, which walked to meet him.

He stopped in the entrance and stared back, then again

shrieking, he sprung in and tightly closed the trap; he had seen the mustang, seized with fear, scour away over the plain, and coming toward the hillock on the stalking black horse was the terrible, strange form—the *Trailer's spirit*!

Still shined the moon quietly down. There is dire trouble in the Land of Silence to-night.

CHAPTER XI

A REFUGE IN TIME.

AWAY rode the Apaches galloping south-east, leading the captured horses behind them. In the sudden surprise and retreat they had forgotten to retain those articles which they had fixed their eyes on, only a few diminutive and easily-carried articles being clung to. Their most precious prize had been abandoned—the caddy of "black Navy"—far more precious in their estimation than gold or ornaments. It had been pounded, hammered, dashed against wagon hubs, but in vain; and so, though reluctantly, they rode away minus two braves, with two more fatally wounded, with a paltry prize of twelve aged, heavy horses, whose best run was a mere rapid canter, and who were incumbered with heavy, impeding harness.

Not knowing the nature or number of their foes, they were riding away toward a part of the plain some twenty miles distant, which was traversed by numerous and deep *arroyos* (small chasms or deep ravines) which in their great number and devious windings afforded excellent shelter.

Looking back, though they could not see more than several miles in the hazy moonlight, they were certain that they were pursued, but by whom or how many they could not determine.

They had been plundering the abandoned wagons of their recent victorious foes—that they were aware of; but where they had been so effectually concealed, or how many

they numbered were enigmas the shrewdest could not unravel.

Moonlight still hung over the Land of Silence, and the round full orb in the eastern zenith still shone clearly. Still rode the savages on.

Behind, but gaining, came five white men, or about one-fifth of the savages, riding faster and quite as directly toward the plain of the *arroyos*. The savages, as they rode over the ground, chattered noisily—these men, too, conversed, but gloomily.

"We can not distinguish the Apaches—perhaps we are straying from the trail," remarked Louis Robidoux.

"Ain't nuther!" This from the guide, surlily.

"How do you know?" asked Sam, spurring to the guide's side.

"Bekase we air goin' ter the eye-dentical place whar they're goin'."

"Where is that—to the ravines?"

"Gulches. Dead Man's Gulches."

"Why are they named so strangely?"

"Because a man that gits in thar stands a mighty poor show to git out again. You've seen them Chinese puzzles, haven't you?—we boys used to have them at school. The only difference between the two is, that whar yer kin easy git ter the center of the Gulches, you kain't in the puzzle; but both air mighty hard ter git out of. I've seen a man that said he traveled *four days* trying ter git out, and didn't move a mile in the whole time. The creeks are parallel, criss-cross, angling—every which way; and they are deep and wide. God pity the greenhorn that gits inter them."

"I heard a Mexican tell some whopping yarns about some Dead Man's Gulches, but I didn't believe him; but sence ye say so and back him, why I'll hev ter give in, I reckon," remarked Burt Scranton.

"Wait till yer git thar an' then see fur yourself," suggested the guide. "Durn me ef I want any truck with 'em, you hear ME, gran'mother?"

"Then you are sure the red-skinned knaves will go to the Gulches?" interrogatively spoke Sam.

"Sartain. They're skeered and don't know who shot at

'em. Thar's mighty peert shelter in the Gulches, an' that's whar every Apache fur miles 'round skedaddles ter when he's hard pressed. I'll bet my bottom dollar we'll be sure ter find 'em thar."

"You, too, Jack?" Cimarron Jack nodded.

"Very well; how far distant are they?"

"A matter of fifteen or twenty miles, p'r'aps. About two hours' sharp spurring."

"All right then. Spur up, boys, spur up! Here goes for the Gulches—hurrah!"

"Hurrah for Dead Man's Gulches!" was the answer, as on they sped.

"Three and a tiger for the catamount-chewers; for the rattlesnake-charmers; for the scorpion-eaters; and for the cocks of the walk!" yelled Cimarron Jack, suiting the action (the former one) to the word.

They were given lustily, and the trampled herbage under the ringing hoofs slowly raised to find that the ruthless destroyers were passed on and were rapidly receding from sight.

Two hours later. Now the moon was in the zenith, round, white and gleaming, and the actors in the varying tragedy were passing over a different landscape. The plain, though still level, taken as a whole, was cut into many islands, capes, peninsulas—into all manner of curious shapes by the deceitful ravines and small creeks, called Dead Man's Gulches.

Winding in and out, slipping, crawling, and at short times and long intervals, trotting, was a serpentine train of dusky forms, twisting and climbing deeper and deeper into the wild and sandy maze.

Ever and anon they looked back, and some grinned sardonically, while others frowned and fingered their tomahawks nervously. They were looking at a small party behind who were just entering the Gulches, a mile away, and who were coming boldly and rapidly on in pursuit.

Unlike the savages they were unincumbered with leading horses, and were able to move much more rapidly. They were also in Indian file and were headed by Simpson, the guide—now a guide in a useful and important sense, for he

was acquainted with many (not *all*, by any means) of the mazes into which they were involving themselves.

"Durn my hide!" he growled, as he mounted an eminence.

"Gee-whiz! what a pile of 'em thar is. Gee-whittaker! ef they'd turn and surround us in these durned gulches what a *battue* thar'd be. A serround—it'd be the last of every mother's son of us."

The guide was losing his taciturnity—a sure sign he was in earnest, and so he was.

"We'd better look sharp," resumed Jack.

"Keep your eyes open all of you and see that no red rascal leaves the main pack. The moon shines clear and we can easily tell if any one drops into a hole."

They obeyed his instructions, and leaving the guide to find the way, steadily watched the retreating band. Now they would be sharply outlined against the sky, winding out of view like a tread-mill; now they would appear coursing over a level "reach;" and again they would disappear altogether.

"Cuss the place!" sharply exclaimed Burt, as his horse slipped down a low bank. "It's jest like the old Adirondacks, on a small scale. I'll bet them devils make two rods ter our one."

"No, they don't," said Jack. "They are held back by our horses—durn 'em. We'll soon catch 'em."

"Then what will we do—they are five to our one, and all armed with good rifles the Government gave them?" queried Sam.

"Fight—we can do nothing else. The Government didn't give 'em rifles—it's the Ingun agents. They make a handsome profit on the rifles, trading 'em for furs and the like. The Inguns get guns and then turn round and kill whites with them."

"But the Apaches have no agent."

"What difference does that make? The northern tribes do—good breech-loading rifles are given them by the stand. There's such a thing as trade, and swop, and steal—as much among Inguns as whites. The reservation Inguns don't have much use for rifles, so they trade 'em off to hostile tribes. You bet sometime I'm going to try for an Ingun agency, then—hurrah!"

"K'rect!" came from the guide.

"Hullo!" cried Burt, sharply. "The pack ain't quite so big as it was."

They ceased and looked ahead. Surely enough, the band had diminished one-half at least. The remainder still kept on, though with slackened speed. The guide stopped short.

"It's not any use ter go much further—fust thing we know we'll be inter a big ambuscade. Any thing but that, say I."

"We can keep on for three or four hundred yards yet, Tim. They've stopped in some big gulch while the rest have gone on. They will lie there to pepper us when we come on and they won't stir. We might get in a volley on them, too, by riding along."

The guide cogitated for a moment. The plan seemed feasible, and accordingly he again bent his eyes to the ground, and the party glided in and out among the gulches.

"Now, fellows, and you 'specially, Robidoux, mind your eye. We ain't on a bare plain, now, but in a devilish mean place. Keep close to Simpson and have your guns cocked and ready. Ride slow, Simpson!"

"Ay, ay!" and as the guide slackened his pace they clustered about him. Now the gulches grew narrower, deeper, and thicker. It became difficult to climb some of the sandy, yielding, and precipitous banks; the descents, too, became attended with danger. Sometimes they were forced to follow a ravine some little distance in order to find an emerging place; then again they were obliged to ride along a bank to find a safe descending spot. This irksome and dangerous task was rendered doubly dangerous by the fact that at some advanced point, they knew not where, nearly a score of bloodthirsty and cunning Apaches lay waiting for their scalps.

The foremost band still retreated, but slowly in order to stimulate them to greater haste, which would, of course, be attended with a large degree of recklessness. They were within half a mile, having lost ground, and were apparently beating the led horses to urge their lagging steps. But the sharp eyes of Scranton had given them timely warn-

ing, without which they would surely have run into a fatal trap.

They were now on a "reach" and had space for a fast trot of a hundred yards or more, when they would reach the brink of a yawning chasm, black and gloomy in its dark and serpentine shadow. Here the guide stopped, followed by the others.

"It's no use ter go further," he said. "Do yer see that big gulch ahead? Wal, yer may bet yer lives that in that black shadder more 'n a dozen dirty 'Patchies air watchin' us. We'll stop fur a change, right hyar."

"Here's a splendid place for a stand," said Jack, pointing to a deep fissure adjacent.

"Le's climb for that, and if there's any 'Patchies in the gully, yender, ye'll see how quick they'll come skinning out, when they find out we've found 'em out."

"And we'll rout them out, right out," said the Canadian, mimicking Jack's speech. The latter turned upon him and grasped him by the throat.

"This ain't the first time you've insulted me," he cried; "but, by Judas, it'll be the last."

Huff! a stream of flame shot out from the shadow, a loud report sounded, and a bullet whistled past Jack's head. His timely and sudden change of position had saved his life.

Letting loose the malicious Canadian, he spurred his horse toward the fissure.

"Come on!" he cried, "we are attacked! Yonder's the other pack coming back to help; right down in this gully; now, lively!"

Pell-meh, helter-skelter, they dashed recklessly into the friendly fissure, while simultaneously a hideous, blood-curdling yell rung out from the black, shadowy gulch, and a harmless volley sped over their heads. They were discovered and perhaps entrapped—the fight had arrived, and they were opposed to and harassed by, five times their number of wily, cruel, unrelenting foes.

In five minutes the "reach" was swarming with yelling, screeching and bloodthirsty Apaches, forming to pounce upon the devoted band below.

CHAPTER XII.

A MYSTERIOUS SHOT.

AFTER the Canadian had trembled, shuddered and brooded awhile without being alarmed by a second visitation, he began to look into the why and the wherefore of it. To follow his vague and erratic mind-wanderings would be a dull task, as he was too terrified and confused to shape his thoughts into any discernible matter.

An hour perhaps passed and it was now the early morning. In the cave the torch cast its flickering light over a dull, gloomy scene. Pedro and Mr. Wheeler lay motionless in a semi-stupor ; Duncan muttered disjointedly in his sleep, bewailing and cursing his hard lot ; the horse of the Mexican stood in his giant proportions quietly in a corner ; and only the Canadian was at all conscious of passing sounds and events. These had not come—were yet to arrive ; and arrive they did in no very merry manner.

All had been quiet, Duncan in his heavy sleep forgetting to snore, when the mustang, Dimple, nickered loudly ; at the same moment Pedro turned uneasily and muttered :

“ The Trailer—my precious, yellow gold.”

The Canadian started, and springing to his feet glanced round in the darkness as though momentarily expecting a second visitation of the man in the towering hat ; but all was quiet, the torch flickered weirdly, and he again sat near the entrance.

“ What does he mean ?” he soliloquized.

“ The Trailer—that means that horrible ghost. And yellow gold—what does that mean ? He has seen the specter—that I am satisfied of ; it accounts for his strange alarm and apathy ; but the gold, the gold—what gold does he mean ?”

Another shrill nicker from Dimple outside ; in his abstraction he noted it not but went on with his soliloquy.

“ I have hunted the moose on Moosehead Lake, and on

on the head-waters of the Penobscot; I've lumbered on the Kennebec and Androscoggin; I've fished in the Thousand Isles; I've hunted the bear in the Missouri Ozarks; but of all the ghastly moons that ever shone, this one to-night is the ghastliest. The very moon in the Land of Silence is different from other moons—or the same moon at other places. There it is white; here it is yellow, red, and sometimes even blood-red, like a ruby. What a quiet, ghastly place—this vast yellow wilderness; how still the air always is; how sultry and hazy the days and dreamy the nights; how— Halloa!"

Again the mustang nickered, shriller and wilder than before. He was about to resume, when a wild, unearthly yell broke upon the quiet night air—a yell as if Pandemonium had broken loose. Starting back with fear, he clasped his hands, then ran to the entrance and flung it open.

He closed it as quickly, if not sooner, as a rumbling sound came from behind the hillock, a sound of thundering hoofs, and the hideous yell pealed again; then, as he peeped through a chink, he saw the cause.

Riding like wild-fire, screaming and whooping, came a dozen Indians, charging on the wagons from behind the hill. Clustering together with tossing arms, they rode swoop down upon them. He started down, then ran quickly to Pedro.

"Pedro—Pedro Felipe—wake up—arise; we are charged by Apaches."

At the word Apaches Pedro rose suddenly, from sheer habit, as his eye was vacant, and his air that of a somnambulist; his energy was short-lived, and he sunk down again.

"Pedro—for heaven's sake get your gun; we are attacked."

"Have you seen it?"

"Seen them? Yes; they are yelling outside—don't you hear them? Come, hurry!"

"Have they got my gold?"

Robidoux was sharp enough to take advantage of this question, and he replied:

"Yes, yes; all of it. Come, hurry!"

Pedro needed no other incentive, but sprung from his couch

and grasped his rifle. Springing toward the door, he hoarsely said :

“ Senor, here we go—altogether ; *Caramba !* ”

Before Robidoux could stop him he had flung back the trap-door and was standing outside, aiming at a slender Apache just entering a wagon. The broad, dusky back of the savage, in contrast to the moonlit, white wagon-cover, offered a good mark ; and quickly sighting, the Mexican drew the trigger. The Apache, with a wild yell, sunk back on the wagon-tongue and hung suspended across it, killed immediately. This was a decidedly favorable event ; for, awakened by the sight of his habitual foe, aroused by his successful shot, Pedro was himself again.

The Canadian smiled as Pedro darted back into the cave, at seeing a once more natural expression on his features. Should he retain his equanimity they had but little to fear beyond the plundering of the train, and that might be prevented for the present, as the whole line of wagons was commanded by the entrance.

The utmost confusion prevailed among the dusky plunderers as the fatal bullet ended their companion's career forever. Some darted behind wagons ; some flew to their adjacent mustangs ; two clambered into a wagon ; while the rest scattered like rabbits, not knowing by whom the shot was fired, or where the precise marksman was stationed.

They were thoroughly alarmed, inasmuch as, not belonging to Red-Knife's band, they had accidentally fallen upon the train. They had been surprised at not finding a human being near the wagons ; they were thunder-struck at the mysterious shot and its fatal effect.

Their alarm and surprise was somewhat dissipated very soon by Pedro's firing from a chink in the trap-door. He had aimed at the prostrate form of a savage, lying on the ground behind a wagon ; the bullet struck him fairly in the side, and, with a groan of mortal agony, he stretched himself prone, to speedily die.

Though by this shot Pedro had reduced his enemies' number in some degree, still, upon the whole, the shot was disadvantageous, in this wise : when he fired, the chink being small, the force of the explosion had carried away a portion of the

rotten planking, making the aperture distinctly visible from the wagons. The lynx-eyed savages instantly discovered this, and were instantly aware the hill was hollow—a mere shell.

A grunt of relief and gratification went around the line of skulking figures, speedily changed to one of alarm. A hole, black and wide, suddenly appeared in the hillside; a stream of flame shot out, a report sounded, and two savages yelled loudly, and, with their comrades, clambered upon the wheels in order to effectually conceal themselves, and protect their bodies from the murderous fire.

“Well done!” remarked Pedro to his companions, all of whom had taken part in the volley. “We killed none, but made them howl, nevertheless.”

Cool, deliberate, noble Pedro was himself again—the far-famed scout and feared Indian-fighter. Now was his brain clear; now were his nerves steady; and the famous master of Indian strategy was rapidly running down his No. 1 buck-shot, with eyes sparkling like a ferret’s.

“Senors—sirs, fire not hastily. It is a fault with you Americans—you are not sufficiently aware of the importance of keeping cool. See! they have quite concealed themselves; never mind, we are entirely safe, well ammunitioned, and able to prevent them from plundering the wagons. Keep cool, watch every point, and when you fire be sure and aim.”

“I hope they won’t hurt any of my tin cups,” anxiously muttered Duncan. “We haven’t got but five, and one of them leaks. “It’ll be just like ’em to go and eat all my brown sugar up—oh, my boot-heels! if they do how I’ll get cussed. If the President of the United States was struck by lightning you fellers ’d cuss me, and say I was to blame.”

“Less talking, senor, if you please,” gently admonished Pedro. “‘All tongue no sand,’” as Simpson says.

A few minutes passed, and suddenly Duncan broke out again:

“Every hair of my head! Save it—oh, save it, for heaven’s sake!”

“Save what?” asked Robidoux.

“Don’t you see that small stream running down through the wagon-bottom?”

“I see something dark, I think. What is it?”

"Flour ! flour ! Oh, save it ! My boot-heels ! won't I get a cussing when I tell 'em they can't have any more biscuit ? Everybody 'll swear at me : Cook, I never saw such a clumsy bunch of darned carelessness ; cook, the next time you want buffler-chips or fire-wood you can get 'em yourself ; never ask me to pack water for you again, cook, for I won't do it, you careless, wasteful old cook ; then Cimarron Jack, or whatever you call him, 'll sure desert, 'cause I couldn't help myself when the Injuns wasted the flour—he, a feller that don't get bread of any kind once a year. Oh, every hair of my head ! I'm the cussing-post for the world to swear at—me, the camp-cook, a low, thankless dog."

"I will see they are informed of the true state of affairs, now," said Pedro, consolingly.

Duncan burst out, in high dudgeon :

"Think that 'll do any good ? think 'ee, think 'ee ? Sir, I solemnly swear it!—if you put your hand on the Bible afore an *alcalde*, or whatever you call him, and swear—yes, sir, swear upon your oath, they'd still cuss me and say I'm the one to blame. Oh, curse the unlucky, miserable day I learned to cook !

"If any young man should come to me and ask me for advice," he resumed, after a brief pause, "perhaps I couldn't tell him what *to* do, but I could just naturally tell him what *not* to do. I'd say, young man, don't let any fellow inveigle you into learning the pastry-cook's trade—it 'll be the ruin of you. Oh, look at my flour—going all the time."

During the time in which he had been speaking, the moon had been steadily moving on its downward, westward course, making the wagon-shadows larger, perceptibly. Though but little longer, they were of sufficient length to form a black isthmus between the wagons and the most distant end of the hill. Duncan, on stopping, observed a change come o'er the face of the grand old strategist. From a cool, impassible calm it had changed to an expression of positive terror, which as quickly vanished, giving, in turn, place to a look of moderate anxiety.

Stepping to the torch, he extinguished it, gazing anxiously to the roof before so doing. Then in the darkness he whispered :

"Senor Wheeler, you will be of more use in guarding the door. Allow me to advise you to look well to it. Men, you two place yourselves by my side, in readiness to fire."

They did so, and he continued:

"I saw, just now, the entire body of the Apaches scamper along that longest shadow to the right. They have discovered the hill is only a shell, and will endeavor to force their way into it before daybreak. There are now nine of them and they will at once go to work. There is nothing to be feared—the moon shines so brightly that we can see the slightest crevice they may make."

No longer they watched the wagons in the bright moonlight; but with every confidence in their famous leader, with hands touching his garments, they waited, looking at the small chinks in the roof through which the white sky shone plainly.

Pedro was an infallible prophet when he prophesied, for this reason—he never prognosticated without mature deliberation, always ruled by existing circumstances. Men wondered and marveled, but, superficial themselves, considered it a marvelous power, when, like many other strange powers (?), it was only the legitimate offspring of two healthy parents—shrewdness and thought.

In this case he was right. Before five minutes had passed, a slight noise was heard on one side of the slanting roof, rather low down, a grating rasping noise.

"They are boring. God grant they haven't got my butcher-knife!" excitedly whispered Duncan, in a fever. "Where do you think they are boring with their cussed knives and hatchets?"

Pedro chuckled.

"They are working too low to reach us. There is one part—a quarter—of the hill that is solid. They are boring at that place, ha! ha!"

The rasping continued, growing louder and harsher. The savages were strangely bold and reckless. No other noise was heard, only the same quick, grating sounds—grate, grate—as the metal weapons glanced from the flinty, pebbly soil.

"If they were boring on this side, now, they would be nearly through, I judge by their vigorous, rapid work," observed Pedro. "But, as they are at work on a solid part of the hill, they will get through to us in about a week. Ha! ha! Apache!" and he laughed, tauntingly.

"I wonder where the others are," interrogatively spoke the Canadian. "They might be in trouble for all we know."

"Near the Dead-Man's Gulch," replied Pedro. "I believe they took that route in pursuit."

"They stand a slim chance of recovering the horses."

"I was not well at the time the attack was made," and if it had been light a blush would have been seen on Pedro's cheek. "How many did they number?"

"About thirty, I believe," Simpson said.

"Six to one—hum! Well, the odds are certainly against them. If we were only out of this hole now, we might ride to their assistance."

"And leave the girl—the sweet, pretty lass?"

"Ah, that is a painful mystery—painful indeed. It quite astounds me."

"Mr. Wheeler and Carpenter are well-nigh crazy over it. It is lucky in one way that these cussed Apaches have been pestering us—they have kept their thoughts somewhat away from her. Poor Miss Kissie! where has she gone?"

"Hark!"

A loud report came to their ears, and at the same time, though unseen by them, the working Indians, with a loud whoop, fled from the hill. A shriek of agony at the same time resounded from the roof, and a body dropped heavily with a hollow sound.

"By every hair of my head!" cried Duncan, "hear them rascals skedaddle!"

"Who shot?" cried Pedro. "Senor, I say, who shot?"

"It came from inside the hill, I'll take my oath to it!" declared Robidoux.

"I know it did, senor—I know it did;" and Pedro's voice showed he was excited. "No one shot here, and some one shot from inside the hill and killed a savage. Who shot?"

They could not tell.

CHAPTER VI.

A MIRACULOUS ESCAPE.

ON the "reach" above the fissure in which Cimarron Jack's band was concealed, danced and whooped the entire band of Apaches, eager for white blood, and, as prospects appeared, in good chances of getting it. Conspicuous among the painted pack stalked Red-Knife, the renegade, to and fro, cogitating and framing a feasible plan for extermination.

It needed not a very subtle brain or a very bold man to ferret out the whites from their present position, and well he knew it. While many plans, ideas and means gratuitously presented themselves to his scheming head, but one was accepted—at once the most feasible, the easiest executed, and the one attended with the least danger—a surround.

Conjectured, planned, advocated—done; so he thought, in his inordinate self-esteem. He did not for a moment consider that the noted "squaw from the bitter river" was thoroughly versed in savage warfare—that he had a vast store of experience to draw from—that he was crafty and brave as a lion. In his vast conceit, he entirely ignored the fact, and went directly on with putting his plan into execution.

The whites were in an isolated fissure about fifteen feet in depth by twenty wide and one hundred long, in the shape of a horse-shoe, the party being ensconced under the bank at the "caulk" in the concavity. Here they were safe for the present, but a small ravine opening from the fissure, rendered their situation precarious. This ravine played an important part in the tragedy, for whose acts the actors were now preparing earnestly.

Where it entered the "horse-shoe" fissure, it was narrow, being only about three feet in width, but in a hundred yards it ran under sandy banks, and widened out to forty feet or more. These sandy banks were crumbling and projecting, overhanging the ravine (more properly a "draw"), they presented an unstable footing.

Red-Knife noticed this "draw," and at once, without con-

sulting his chiefs, whom he ignored, commenced operations. Detaching a party of three to take charge of the distant draft-horses, he divided his party of twenty into two portions. One of these he directed to creep along the shadow of a projecting bluff until they had made half the circuit of the horse-shoe; the other, commanded in person by himself, was to enter the "draw," keeping in shadow as much as possible. Halting in the draw, they were to give a preconcerted signal, then both parties were to prosecute a cross-fire with what arms they possessed. Such a position would completely command the horse-shoe fissure with its hidden occupants.

"Boys," observed Cimarron Jack, sitting on a mud-boulder, "this is lovely; but the thorough-bred from Tartary don't scare worth a cent. It takes mighty fine working to face the grizzly domesticator—it does, for a fact."

"Oh, quit yer durned, disgustin' braggin'! It makes me feel ashamed of the hull human race," growled Simpson.

Cimarron Jack went on, with a sly twinkle at the guide:

"In addition to my noble and manly qualities, I have the coveted and rare faculty of insnaring women. Educated at college, of good looks, as you can see, engaging manners, I cast rough rowdies like this knave of a guide into the shade. That, you see, makes 'em hot—red-hot; and when I give, as is my custom, a brief and extremely modest synopsis of my talents, they call it, in their vulgar way, 'braggin'.' I'm the cock of the walk—hooray! I'm the scorpion and centipede chewer—the wildcat educator—hooray!"

"Faugh! it's downright sickening. Durned ef I kain't lick any man that brags so!" declared the guide, with real rising choler. "An' ef he don't like it he kin lump it—thet's Simpson, the guide."

"Dry up; what's that?" whispered Jack. "Look out, boys—there's something forming. Look along that bluff yonder—I think I see something moving there."

The half-earnest wrangle was ceased, and shading his eyes, the guide peered, as if endeavoring to pierce the drapery of shadow under the bluff; but if Jack saw any thing, there was no repetition of the object. Taking his eyes from the bluff, Cimarron Jack turned round, then uttered a suppressed cry.

"What is it?" sharply demanded the guide, instantly on the alert.

"Whew! look there—look yonder!"

They followed the direction of his pointing finger with their gaze. Up the draw, and in its widest part, were nearly a dozen Apaches, or rather parts of them, moving rapidly about. They were visible from their waists upward, and their arms were tossing as if violently excited. The light of the yellow moon made this a most grotesque spectacle, but an utterly incomprehensible one to the whites, who watched them eagerly. It appeared as if a dozen Apaches had been deprived of their legs at the loins, and had been cast into the draw and were tossing their arms in agony. Part of them were upright, part bending their necks forward, while others were bent backward; and all were gesticulating violently.

It was strange, but they were all facing the west, at right angles to the course of the draw. Though wildly gesturing, and, as it seemed, struggling, they preserved the utmost silence, frequently gazing toward the whites, as if fearful of attracting their notice.

"What can it mean?" asked Sam, utterly confounded. "What does it all mean?"

"I think I know," replied Jack, after a moment's sober scrutiny; "don't you, Simpson?"

"Yes—think so."

"What is it?" and Robidoux's face wore a look of the most intense surprise.

"By Jupiter—hooray! it is, it is! look, they are sinking."

It was even so! Each and all were only visible from the breast upward, now, and their rifles, still clasped tightly, were thrown about in wild and vehement motions; the guide uttered a sharp exclamation.

"Quicksanded—quicksanded! see—the draw is darker than at t'other places. It's the black sand—quicksand—hooray!"

"Great Heaven!" ejaculated Carpenter. "They are sinking into a quicksand—hurrah!"

"They war makin' a serround and got cotched—hooray!" shouted the guide; then the voice of Cimarron Jack rung out:

"Give it to 'em boys—give it to 'em ! aim steady till I count three, and then—one !"

Up went the guns, each man taking a struggling, sinking savage.

"Two !"

A steady dead aim.

"Three !"

Crash—shriek ! and then a cloud of dense, sluggish smoke obscured the river. They had no more than lowered their rifles when a shrill yell arose behind them, and a rush of feet was heard. Cimarron Jack dropped his rifle and drew his knife and revolver, facing round.

"Draw, boys—draw ! bakers and knives. A surround ! here comes t'other gang behind us—draw quick and don't faze !"

They drew, each a knife and revolver, and faced round, fearing nothing from the helpless band behind, some of whom must be dead. They did so just in time.

From under the projecting bluff darted nine stalwart Apaches, knives and tomahawks in hand. They had seen their comrades' utter helplessness and discomfiture, and looking over the smoke of the volley, had seen four shot and instantly killed. Burning with rage and chagrin, they were coming, fifty yards away, with determined faces gleaming hideously through the red war-paint.

As they rapidly drew near, Jack cried :

"Work those pistols lively, boys—shoot a thousand times a minute."

They obeyed. Crack—crack ! went the pistols, and, though excited, the aim was tolerably correct, and two Indians went down, one killed, another disabled. Seven still came on, though warily, facing the revolvers of the whites, Colt's great invention doing deadly work at a short distance. They were running at a dog-trot, dodging and darting from side to side to prevent any aim being taken ; in another moment they were fighting hand to hand.

It was a short, deadly struggle, briefly terminated. Jack, Simpson, and Burt fell to the ground when their respective antagonists were nigh, avoiding the tomahawks which flew over their heads. Then as an Apache towered over each,

they rose suddenly, and throwing their entire weight and muscle into the act, plunged their knives into the savage breasts; the red-skins fell without a groan.

It was a perilous, nice operation, and few would have dared attempt it; but knowing if they kept their nerve and temper they would prove victorious, they accepted the chances, as we have seen, with the highest success. Calculating nicely, each had about an interval of *two seconds* to work in—the interval between the Apaches' arrival and his downward knife-thrust.

Gigantic, fiery Jack stayed not to enjoy a second and sure thrust, but withdrawing his long knife, hastily glanced around. Back under the bank was a man fighting desperately with two Apaches—fighting warily, yet strongly, and in silence.

It was Carpenter, cutting, thrusting, and dodging. Jack needed but a glance to satisfy him. Carpenter would soon prove a victim to the superior prowess of the Apaches, and with a wild hurrah sprung forward, just as Burt and the guide were disengaging themselves from the dead bodies of their antagonists. But, he was stopped suddenly.

Covered with mud, dripping with water, and glowing with rage and heat, a fierce, stalwart savage sprung before him, and he knew him in a moment. It was Red-Knife—he had escaped from the quicksand and was now preparing to strike, his tomahawk glinting above his head.

“Dog from the bitter river—squaw! ugh!” and down went the hatchet.

But not in Jack's skull—the Indian scout was too electric in his thoughts and movements to stand calmly and feel the metal crash into his brain. Bending low, with the quickness of a serpent, he darted under the savage's arm just in time, but he stopped not to congratulate himself upon his escape, but turning clasped the chief round the waist and suddenly “tripped him up.”

The savage's thigh passed before his face as the chief was hurled backward. A stream of deep-red blood was spirting from a wide gash in it—the momentum of the hatchet had been so great Red-Knife had been unable to check it, and it had entered his thigh and severed the main artery. The blood was spirting in a large, red stream in the air, and

he felt the warm liquid splash and fall on his back. But he whirled the faint chief over on his back, and with a sudden, keen blow, drove the knife into his heart. With a last dying look of malevolency the chief scowled on his victorious enemy, then the death-rattle sounded in his throat—he was dead, no longer a renegade.

Jack sprung up and stood on his guard, but there was no necessity. Short as the combat had been (only *three minutes* in duration) it was now over, being finished as the guide drew his knife from a convulsively-twitching savage, and wiped it on his sleeve.

Save the eight prostrate savages, not an Indian was in sight. Cool, steady, reticent Tim Simpson sheathed his knife and picked up his gun and revolver.

“Durned spry work!”

He was not answered. To the majority of the band the thought was overwhelming—that, where fifteen minutes since, thirty cunning Apaches were surrounding them, *not one* remained alive. For several minutes no one spoke, but all gazed around on the battle scene.

The draw above was empty—the sinking savages, foiled in their bloody purpose, had sunk to their death. Carpenter moodily gazed where they were last visible, and murmured:

“God bless the quicksand.”

“Ay, ay!” came from the others’ lips.

Cimarron Jack sprung up at the “reach,” and looked around.

“Yonder go three—no, four devils, striking away for dear life. Durn them! they’ve got enough of it this time, I’ll bet.”

“Hosses thar?” asked Simpson.

“One, two, three, eight—every one of ’em.”

“Le’s git out’n this, then.”

“All right—before any more come down on us. Devilish pretty work, wasn’t it?” admiringly queried Jack, looking down on the dead bodies below. “How’d you get away with your job, Carpenter?”

“The guide and Burt came to my assistance just as I was giving out. A minute more and it would have been too late.”

"And you, Ruby? curse me if I don't forgive you—you fou't like thunder. Two on you, wasn't there?"

"Yes; I stabbed one and the other ran off, seeing Simpson coming for him," modestly replied Robidoux.

"Well, we've no time to talk. The red rascals are cleaned out—pick up your weapons, boys, and mount your mustangs, and we'll get away from this hot place."

They stopped not to gaze longer upon the bloody scene, but mounting their horses, which under the bank had bravely stood, rode toward the deserted draft-horses. They were easily collected, and then all rode away, just as the moonlight was yielding to the paler but stronger one of day. Elated with victory they left Dead Man's Gulches (or that part of them) with the ghastly bodies, soon to wither into dry skin and bone, and under the paling moonlight rode away, bound back to the Hillock.

Thanks to the guide's memory and cunning, they emerged from the Gulches at sunrise, and struck out into the yellow plain—safe and sound, wholly uninjured, and victorious.

"Five men victorious over thirty Apaches," cried Jack. "A tiger-feat—Hercules couldn't do better with Sampson and Heenan, with fifty gorillas thrown in for variety. Three and a tiger for the bravest, smartest, *handsomest* men in the world. With a will, now!"

With a will they were given.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHO SPEAKS?

WHEN at the mysterious shot and death of one of their number, the Apaches fled down the hillock, they scuttled for the wagons as offering the best concealment. However, their doing so was to their loss, diminishing their number by two. Duncan, incensed at the ruthless waste of his flour, and in perfect keeping with his disposition, had lain in watchful wait for an opportunity to present itself whereby he could re

venge his loss. An opportunity occurred as they fled toward the wagons. One savage, with a scarlet diamond on his broad back, offering a fair aim, he took advantage of it and fired. At the same time, Pedro, ever ready to embrace any opportunity, fired also.

Both shots were successful. Duncan's Apache threw his arms aloft, and with a yell, plunged headlong; the other sunk to the ground, with a sharp cry of pain, then crawled slowly away, dragging himself painfully. But he was summarily stopped by Duncan, who emptied one of his cylinders at him. This was sufficient; with a last expiring scowl back upon his foes, he settled prone upon the sand, and his soul went to the happy hunting-grounds.

"There have been strange happenings here lately," gloomily remarked Pedro, ramming down a bullet. "Who shot just now—tell me that?"

"Who can?" replied Mr. Wheeler. "Oh, God! if one misfortune were not enough to bear without a mystery, deep and black, to drive one to torments. Where is my child?" and he buried his face in his hands.

"And where is my gold—my precious, yellow treasure?" fiercely demanded Pedro.

"What misfortune can compare with mine? what agony as great to bear? how—"

Seeing his companion's eyes fixed interrogatively upon him, he stopped short, conscious he had been unduly excited and heedless. Turning sharply to his peeping-place, he said:

"Senors, we have lessened their number; of them there remains but six. One or two more killed or disabled would entirely free us, I think, from their annoying company. Come, senors, look sharp!"

Duncan and Robidoux exchanged significant glances but said nothing, only quietly taking their places at the entrance, leaving Mr. Wheeler stricken again by his gloomy spirits.

And now faint streaks of daylight slanted across the eastern horizon, and the yellow moonlight paled before the approach of the predominating daylight. Perched upon the hubs of the wagon-wheels the sullen Apaches grunted and growled at their constant defeats, not daring to return to the hill, and too wary to expose any part of their bodies. The

whites watched and waited with the eyes of a lynx and the patience of a cat, but to no avail—both parties were afraid to show themselves.

“Hark!” suddenly cried Mr. Wheeler, springing into the center of the cave. “What is it—who speaks?”

“No one spoke, senor,” said Pedro, calmly laying his hand on his shoulder; “you are nervous and excited, senor—lie down and quiet yourself.”

“Don’t talk to me of rest and peace—withdraw your hand! *She* spoke—my daughter—and I will never rest until I have found her.”

In the gloomy light, his eyes shone with at once the sorrow and anger of a wounded stag; and knowing to resist him would be to endanger his present health, Pedro considerably withdrew his hand. As he did so Duncan whispered:

“I’ll swear I heard her voice, just then—every hair of my head, I did.”

“I too imagined I heard a soft voice, but undoubtedly it was the band outside,” continued the Canadian. “Hark—there it is again!”

All listened. Certainly some one spoke in a soft, effeminate voice, though so faintly that it was impossible to distinguish the words.

All listened as though petrified, so intense was the interest—Pedro alive with hope for his gold, and the others, more especially Mr. Wheeler, for his lost child. But there was no repetition of the voice, and after listening for some time they returned to the entrance gloomily.

A sudden movement took place among the Apaches. Their mustangs were grassing out on the plain some five hundred yards distant, being some half a mile from the sorrel mustang which avoided them. Starting suddenly from the wagon-wheels they darted away rapidly toward their steeds, keeping the wagons between them and the hillock, making it impossible for the whites to aim, even tolerably.

“Every hair of my sorrel head! my boot-heels! what in Jupiter do them fellows mean? they’re getting away from us like mad. Skunk after ’em, I reckon.”

Pedro’s face lightened as he said, “There is some one ap-

proaching, possibly the party. Certainly it is some one hostile to them, or—"

He stopped short as a thought flashed over him. Could it be possible they had seen the apparition—that he had appeared to them? no—the idea was rejected as soon as conceived. Not knowing the Trailer, at least that he had been killed once, they would have promptly shot at him, which they had not done. No—it was something else.

It was not a ruse to draw them from their concealment, as every one of the six savages was now scampering hastily for their steeds. They had all retreated—every one; and confident of no harm, Pedro stepped boldly out into the daylight and the open plain.

Down in this country, twilights are brief, and even now the sun was winking over the horizon. Looking round, his gaze fell upon a small collection of objects, directly against the sun, a league or more distant.

"Horsemen—whites."

The Canadian and his companions came out.

"Horsemen, did you say?"

"Yes, senor—white horsemen."

"Ah, I see—toward the east, against the sun. Coming this way too, are they not?"

"Exactly, senor."

"How do you know they are white horsemen?—there are many of them."

"Because they ride together. Indians scatter loosely or ride by twos. These are coming together and are leading horses."

"Every hair on my sorrel-top but you've got sharp eyes!" admiringly spoke the cook.

"Experience, senor—experience. Any Mexican boy could tell you the color of those coming horsemen. But look over the plain; see the brave Apaches scamper toward the south-west, whipping their tardy mustangs. They are gone, and we need fear them no more—they will not come back for the present. We will meet our friends—for it is they."

Of course Pedro was right—he always was; and when the returning and elated party drew up before the hillock, the savages had disappeared.

They had scarcely dismounted when Mr. Wheeler appeared from within. The old gentleman was greatly excited, and begged them to come at once into the cave.

"What's up?" cried Jack, springing toward the entrance. The old man, in broken tones, said he distinctly heard his daughter's voice in the hill, mingled with a deep, harsh one—the voice of a man.

"There must be another chamber!" Pedro shouted.

"There are shovels in the wagons; get them and come on!" echoed Sam.

The shovels were quickly brought, and the whole party, wildly excited, sprung into the cave.

"Now listen!" whispered Mr. Wheeler.

They did so, and distinctly heard a female voice, in pleading tones, at one end of the first chamber.

"There is another chamber, and here it is," cried Jack. "Shovel away—work and dig! Simpson, you and Seranton go outside and see no one escapes. She's in a third chamber, and we'll find her—hurrah!"

"Hurrah! we'll find her!" chorused the wild men, commencing to dig furiously.

CHAPTER XV.

TWICE DEAD.

THEY had not long to dig, as the soil was yielding, and the strong arms of the excited and determined men drove the spades deep into the hillside. Men clamored to relieve each other, and in their wild desire to force their way through, yelled and even pitched dirt away from the workmen with their hands. Never before had the hillock, in all its experience of murders, robberies and crime, looked upon such a wild, frenzied scene.

Furious were the blows showered upon the mold wall—strong the arms of the resolute, high-strung men that wielded them, and eager the hearts that beat for rescue. Indians, fa-

tigue, hunger—all were forgotten; and as fast as a shovelful of dirt was cast from the blade it was thrown far back by the rapidly moving hands of those for whom there were no shovels.

At last the foremost man, Sam, uttered a sharp cry, and struck a furious blow at the wall; his shovel had gone through—there was a third chamber. At the same moment a loud report rung out inside, a woman's voice shrieked, and Sam staggered back, clasping his left arm above the elbow with his right hand; some one from the inside had discharged a rifle at him.

Furious before, the excitement now had become frenzy. Several ferocious blows were struck at the hole; it widened; several more, and the men plunged headlong, found themselves in a third chamber, with a body under their feet—a soft, pliant body. Regardless of aught else, they drew it to the gap, and recognized the features—the face—the form of—Kissie.

They heard a noise, a clamor above, and ran eagerly outside, leaving Sam, pale and sick, yet wild with delight, and Mr. Wheeler, caressing the fair girl, who had fainted away. It is useless to describe the scene—pen can not do it; and knowing the reader's imagination is far more powerful than any description, we leave him to fancy it; it was a meeting of intense joy.

Arriving outside, the men, headed by Cimarron Jack, found the guide and Burt engaged in a fierce struggle with a gigantic man in a *serape*, a conical hat and black plume. Knife in hand, backed up against the hill, with swarthy face glowing, and black eyes sparkling, he was lunging furiously at them in silence. Colossal in form, expert in the use of his knife, rendered desperate by his small chances of escape, the Trailer fought like a demon and kept his smaller opponents at bay.

"Don't kill him!" shouted Jack; "we must take him alive. Let me in to him—stand back, boys. I know who he is—the Trailer."

At the mention of his name, the latter turned and scowled at him, and hoarsely cried:

"Cimarron Jack—my old enemy—may you burn in——!"

Jack, dashing forward with clubbed gun, and with his huge

form towering above his companions, rushed at him. In vain the Trailer endeavored to elude the descending weapon; in vain he darted back; the gun descended full on his head, knocking him backward and prone to the earth, senseless.

Just then a man appeared, running, with a bag in one hand and a long, beautiful rifle in the other; it was Pedro Felipe with his recovered treasure, which he discovered in the new chamber. Finding that the apparition that had haunted him was none other than the ex-robber lieutenant, and that, like himself, he was probably in search of the treasure, he had burned with rage at his theft and crime, and was now seeking his life.

"Dog of a robber—fit associate for your old captain; coward, villain, I have come for your blood! Where is he? Let me reach him."

But they held him back firmly, and after being made cognizant of Cimarron Jack's desire to keep him alive, he calmed himself, and proceeded to bind the senseless robber securely. This he did with his lariat, which he brought from inside, keeping the precious bag with him wherever he went. Then after he had bound him fast, and given the body a slight spurn with his foot, he said:

"When he recovers, we will kill him."

"When the Trailer recovers, he will be shot dead!" added Cimarron Jack.

"Ay, ay!" was the general response.

"All right, boys—let us go and see the pretty girl, and leave the two Robidoux to stand guard over him. My eye; ain't she beautiful, though?"

"You bet!" responded Burt, proudly.

Inside they found Kissie quite recovered, with her father and young Carpenter sitting jealously by her. Though pale and thin, she, in her joy, looked, to the eyes of the men, more charming than ever before.

What had come to pass? Was a revolution about to arise? for when she signified she was very hungry, Duncan stirred hastily about, actually glad of a chance to cook. Mind that—actually glad. As all were hungry, he was forced to call upon the men for assistance, services which they gladly rendered, and soon the savory odor of cooking filled the cave.

"So he gave you enough to eat, did he, my daughter?" asked Mr. Wheeler, gazing fondly into her face.

"Oh, yes, plenty; and a warm, soft blanket to sit upon; and he was kind, too—only sometimes he would rave to himself, stricken by remorse."

"Did he maltreat you in any manner?" fiercely demanded Carpenter.

"Oh, no, not at all. He was away most of the time; and when he was present he always kept busy counting a splendid—oh, so lovely!—treasure he had; all gold, and jewels and ornaments—an immense sum they must be worth."

"That is what brought Pedro here, then," remarked Sam; "he has the bag, now, outside, where he is guarding the Trailer."

"Oh, Pedro was so good to me. When he went out to tell you I was here, that horrid man stole in by a secret passage, snatched the bag from a small hole, then put out the torch and carried me in here. His horse he kept there, and sometimes he would get stubborn and try to kick me; then you should have seen him beat him. Once some Indians tried to cut their way through to us and he shot and killed one."

"Yes, he lies outside now. We heard the shot, and it mystified us," remarked Napoleon Robidoux.

"That villain caused us enough trouble," said Burt. "I'm downright glad he has lost the gold—Pedro has fairly earned it."

"So he has," was the cry.

"A shout came from without, in Pedro's voice:

"Come out—come out!"

Expecting Indians, all rushed out but Sam and Mr. Wheeler, the former being disabled by the bullet of the Trailer, which had passed through his arm, though not breaking it. When they arrived outside they found the Mexican lowering over the ex-robber, who had recovered his senses, and was now scowling upon the party. The blow from the rifle had not proved a very forcible one, as a large "bunch" on his head was the only sign of it.

"Now he has recovered, we will shoot him at once!" and Pedro's eyes sparkled.

"Ay, ay—take him out!" was the unanimous cry.

The Trailer scowled.

All of these men had seen "Judge Lynch," and many had assisted him. Following the order of the age, they did not hesitate, but proceeded at once to business.

They took him from the hillock, from the side of the savage he had slain, and among other red corpses scattered about they placed him upon his feet. He immediately lay down.

"Get up!" commanded Pedro, who was the acknowledged chief.

The robber only scowled in reply.

"Get up, and die like a man and not like a cowering hound!" urged Jack.

This had the effect desired, and the Trailer rose.

"Now, senors, load your rifles!"

"They are all loaded."

"It is well. Have you any thing to say, Trailer?"

No answer save a scowl.

"It is your last chance. Again, have you any thing to say?"

"*Si: car-r-ramba!*"

"It is enough. Take him out."

He was placed now in the open plain, facing the hillock. The men drew up in line, not twenty feet distant.

"Are you all ready, senors?" asked Pedro, aiming at the victim's heart.

"We are ready."

"It is good. Aim well, each at his heart. I will count three. One."

The Trailer's face was a trifle paler now, but his scowl was blacker and more malignant.

"Two!"

The Trailer stood firm. Along the line of men eying his heart he saw no look of mercy, nor look of pity; only a settled determination to execute the law of "Judge Lynch."

Dead silence.

"Three!"

The Trailer fell flat on his face. Lifting him up they found him dead—twice dead—but now forever on earth.

Our tale is ended. Cimarron Jack, with many good wishes and blessings from his true friends, at length tore himself away, and rode off toward the Colorado River, to which place he was *en route*, long to be remembered by those he had befriended. Simpson parted with Pedro much against his will, but was consoled by the latter's promising to meet him on the Colorado. Then he, Pedro, and Cimarron Jack were to unite, and well armed and equipped were to penetrate to the ruins of the old Aztecs—a much talked of, but rarely seen, country. They underwent many marvelous and perilous adventures, but we have not space to relate them.

Pedro was rich—enormously rich—and on returning safely to his “sunny land” was joyfully welcomed back, and congratulated upon his success. God bless him, say we.

When the party arrived at Fort Leavenworth, as they safely did, there was a wedding, and a joyful one it was, too, Sam, of course, being the happy groom. There the party separated, all but Duncan and Simpson continuing their journey east.

Strange to say, Duncan—grumbling, unhappy Duncan—went back with Simpson, in order to explore the Great Colorado Canon with the three Indian-fighters, in the capacity of *camp-cook*. He was unhappy, of course, and he had no cooking conveniences; but managed to assume complete mastery over his strangely-assorted companions, and to keep them alive with his original observations and half-sulky grumblings.

THE END.

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